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EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 377. FOR WEEK ENDING MARCH 21ST, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

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GAY AND GRAVE

Short Stories

Edited by C. Arthur Pearson.

No. 377.] [One Penny.

For the Week ending March 21st, 1896.

THE FLAG OF PIERRE.

On the north-eastern shore of the Lake Champlain is a long, sandy beach. Inland from this stretches the dreary expanse of a tamarack swamp. One afternoon early in October, the only living things plainly in sight along this beach were several small sandpipers that daintily tiptoed over the sand, and the tall blue heron wading in shallow water. But when one looked closely, as did Plover Pierre, one noticed a bunch of bushes stuck into the sand so as to form what hunters term a "blind."

As Plover Pierre scanned the beach he discovered a man lying behind the bushes of the blind. This man was a stalwart, bronzed fellow, perhaps thirty years old; he had on the blue uniform of the United States army, and wore long leather boots, and as he lay stretched on his side a fowling-piece rested on his arm. Just now the lieutenant was yawning. The scene was a stupidly peaceful one, all things were quiet and sleepy—too much so to please the young officer. He longed for a flock of plover to flutter by and relieve the monotony.

"If something doesn't turn up pretty soon," he thought, "I'll stalk my friend, the blue heron—though I believe the old fellow keeps an eye on me, for all his marching along in such an unconscious and dignified manner. He's the only bird bigger than my thumb that I've seen for an hour. Why, so far as sport goes, I might better be at the barracks drilling recruits. But hello! there's a queer bird."

He had seen Plover Pierre. Pierre emerged from the shadow of the evergreens and stood upon the sand. The boy did not see many strangers, so he moved along the beach to investigate this one. As he passed by the little sandpipers tipuped as if making low courtesies to a

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friend, and the blue heron looked at him with less haughtiness than it usually assumed. Perhaps the bird believed that Pierre came to destroy the absurd structure called a blind.

But for once the heron was mistaken. Pierre did not disturb the blind, but crawled behind it to chat with the soldier. At first the boy was half afraid of this long fellow in blue clothes and brass buttons, though his face was kind and friendly. Pierre had once been in a law court at Quebec, where the high official was addressed as monseigneur. The boy decided to use this title in the present instance.

"Monseigneur, are you a Yankee?"

The soldier nodded, and Pierre resumed:

"So am I. We have moved, and now we live one mile south of the line between Canada and Vermont. You see, I am a Yankee by a whole mile."

The soldier laughed, got up, and made room for Pierre.

"Come, what'll you have? Here's some ale, and here's a cigar."

Plover Pierre shook his head. "Jules says liquor is only good to put out a cigar. I want neither."

"Why, this Jules must be a perfect stoic."

"Oh, no; Jules is my friend, and he lives quite near us. He, too, had moved to Vermont."

"And I imagine you're great playfellows," suggested the lieutenant.

"Well, not quite that, monseigneur. He teaches me and knows many stories. You see he is old. He was my father's clerk, and he has white hair standing up all over his head. My father," said Pierre proudly, "was a notary, and knew all things. Jules says my father was quite old when he married the mother. Then he died, and she married Jean Bourdo. He is strong and can work on the farm, but he likes better to be idle." The

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boy was rattling on, when he remembered that Jules said people should not talk too much of their own affairs. A dusky red crept into his swarthy face. "But it tires you to hear all this. Do you come from the barracks across the lake, where they teach new soldiers?"

His new acquaintance smiled assent.

"Jules says it is a shame for United States people to fight each other, but I like wars. I should go if it were not for that."

As Pierre said "that," he looked at something which should have matched the sturdy leg curled beneath him, but it was only a piece of wood fastened to a very short stump of leg. Besides the wooden leg, Pierre carried two yellow crutches. Perhaps it was these slender substitutes for legs which gave him the name of Plover Pierre. The soldier's eye searched the bosom of the lake as though much interested in watching a distant flock of plover.

Pierre's face brightened as he continued: "Although I can't walk well, I ride better than most boys. I might be a horse soldier, and so fight just as hard for my country as can other people. Will you drill me to be a soldier?"

The man in blue shifted his eyes from the imaginary flock of plover and looked at Pierre. "Why, you're too young. You can't be more than ten years old."

"I am twelve, and know well how to shoot."

The officer seemed to be pondering Pierre's soldierly advantages. He muttered to himself: "I wish those fellows I'm drilling had this boy's spirit."

But now the quiet bay was stirred into new life. A steam launch rounded one of the points and puffed towards the young officer's blind. The blue heron gave a cry of surprise, and then, recovering its dignity, swept away with graceful curves of its majestic wings.

The soldier got up and shook the sand from his clothes.

"Here's the government boat come to take me back to Plattsburg barracks."

A small skiff put out from the launch to bring him on board. He threw a few shore birds into the skiff, stepped in himself, and was rowed away.

The government boat flew two flags—a large one at the bow and a smaller one at the stern. When the lieutenant got on board he pulled down the one from the stern, and getting into the skiff again was rowed back to the shore. Pierre was still standing on the sand.

The officer gravely handed the colours to the boy. "Uncle Sam presents these to a valued citizen. Never forget that you are a Yankee"

Pierre, being such a new citizen, did not quite understand the reference to Uncle Sam. But his heart gave a throb of pride, and he reverently took the coloured silk into his grimy hands.

As he hopped back through the swamp road leading to the fields beyond, he thought: "Now I am really a Yankee. The tall man would not give me the flag if he had any doubts about it."

When he reached the log house it was growing dusk. The fat Twins, his half sisters, were rolling over the floor, and Mme. Bourdo busied herself in getting supper. The stout Canadian woman still showed some traces of her comely girlhood. Jean Bourdo's heavy figure lounged by the stove, a greivous obstacle both to his wife and the tumbling twins.

"Jean Bourdo," said Pierre, "would you not like to be a soldier?"

"A good question! And if I went to war, who would earn bread for you to eat?"

"Jules says that if any of my father's money had been well managed it would support all."

Jean turned angrily. "Jules is crazy! And as for your father, Pierre Beaudrie, he did so much burrowing into old books that he had no time to plough the land or collect the fees from the clients."

The woman stopped him. "The notary made a good husband, though he was old enough to be my father. In his time I lived like a lady."

Pierre had hidden the flag under his jacket, and now he climbed the ladder to the loft and put the silk beneath his pillow. He returned to the lower room, the family had supper, and Jean, lighting his pipe, said:

"Pierre, go to bed. I have company to-night, and to-morrow you must be up early to help the thrashers."

Plover Pierre kept nearly as early hours as the plovers themselves. To-night, moreover, he was willing to be alone, for he had plenty to think about. He pulled himself up the ladder as nimbly as could most boys who had two legs. After admiring the bright flag, he carefully laid it away among his few belongings and soon was in bed.

Visions of war and soldiers filled his excited brain. The friendly officer ceased to be an awe-inspiring monseigneur; now he was merely a good comrade, and they were fighting for the same beloved country. Pierre himself, bestride a gallant white charger and holding aloft the emblematic flag, led ranks of horsemen to victory.

The restless boy, tossed by such fancies, must have lain awake for a long time, when he was recalled to himself by hearing a door open and some one enter the room below. Again and again visitors arrived, until there must have been ten men assembled in the lonely cabin.

So many visitors were unusual, and Pierre, at first without meaning to turn eavesdropper, heard enough of their talk to rouse his suspicions. Getting quietly out of bed he put his ear to a crack in the floor and listened.

The men had arranged their business and were about to leave. When they had all risen, one of them spoke to Jean Bourdo:

"Remember, Bourdo, how it is settled. We have to meet here to-morrow afternoon at five—twenty men, armed and on good horses. You, in what disguise you please, are to ride with us, guide us to St. Albans by the shortest road and point out the village banks. We will do the rest. For doing this you are to receive £20. If there seems danger of your being implicated, you can cross the line into Canada, and we will make good all your losses."

Bourdo was satisfied and the men went out.

Plover Pierre, listening overhead, trembled with excitement. He felt sure this was a plot against his new Yankee land—a plot which might compel him to return to Canada. He comprehended that there was trouble ahead for St. Albans, and that the people must be warned. Indeed, he had heard the conspiring of those desperate and irresponsible men, who in 1864, under no authority from Richmond or any government, planned to sweep down from Canada, surprise the village of St. Albans, and robs its banks.

The boy crept noiselessly back to bed, but it was long before he slept. When he did, the flag, the officer, the conspirators and the fated banks pushed their benign and hateful influences into his dreams.

All the next morning Pierre was busy helping the thrashers. Jean would have kept him at work during the

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afternoon as well, but at four o'clock the boy contrived to escape from the barn. Slipping away to the house, he got his flag from the loft where he had left it.

He tried to think of some way of warning St. Albans before the men, who were to leave at five o'clock, could reach there. Lame as he was, it was impossible to walk the fifteen miles in time. Bourdo, he knew, would take the young brown mare, their only horse. Even now he was grooming her in the stable. Pierre was almost in despair, when he remembered that old Jules, their neighbour, had a horse. To be sure it was old and somewhat stiff, but it was better than nothing. He would at once go to Jules and ask for the horse. But moments were precious and there was no time for explanations. He knew where the animal was pastured and must take it without asking. Soon he had caught the old grey, slipped a bridle over its head, and, scorning a saddle, was bestride his steed.

Plover Pierre did not know the country well, but he was sure of the general direction in which St. Albans lay. As he galloped along, Pierre grew excited and was filled with joyous enthusiasm. The small figure of the gaunt grey horse was perhaps a travesty on his vision of the cavalry officer dashing at the head of his troops, but the boy was satisfied. His mission was a responsible one, and he was working for the cause in which he burned to distinguish himself.

He had pushed the flag under his jacket. Now he took it out, and tied it about him like an officer's sash. The people at the few farmhouses along the road stared at this apparition. After he had travelled what seemed to him a long distance, he got into a country where there were no farmhouses. The land was hilly, rough, and used for pasturage alone.

Pierre had no watch, but he thought it must be nearly six o'clock. This could not be the main road to St. Albans. He climbed high hills and looked about, but he could see no village spires. While watching from one of these hills he saw far to the westward a body of horsemen cantering alone on a smooth road.

Pierre's heart sank within him. These were the raiders, and he was too late. His opportunity had come, and he had failed! Discouraged and limp in body, he rode sadly down to the highway where he had seen the horsemen, and followed it back towards his home.

As the raiders dashed through the outskirts of St. Albans the people stared in astonishment at the cavalcade of wild-looking men carrying carbines, and with pistols stuck in their belts. Jean Bourdo dressed as an Indian chief, all his dull wits sharpened by excitement, led them on.

They rode into the midst of the town. The villagers, unconscious of danger, did not molest them. Bourdo pointed out the different banks; these had closed for the day to the public, but the book-keepers were still at their desks. The raiders overpowered them, broke open the safes, and took what money they could hastily gather.

In half-an-hour they were galloping away, firing their pistols as they went. One citizen who appeared at his doorstep was shot and killed. But most of the bullets were fired high in the air. They soon passed the last house, and rapidly moved northward over the same road which Pierre had taken on his return home.

Jules' old horse was growing more and more lame. It was unshod, and this long journey had made its feet tender. Pierre did not like to urge it too much, and so had to be satisfied with a slow trot. The night would now have been quite dark had not a crescent moon shed an uncertain light on the brown fields, and lingered about the bright silk which hung from the shoulder of a small boy perched on a tall, grey horse.

Dark patches of woodland bordered the road, and when Pierre was passing one of these, which he thought not far from home, he heard a clattering of hoofs behind him. He did not expect the raiders to return so soon, but he thought it must be them. The boy feared to let Bourdo see him.

A wood road led into the bushes, and Pierre, riding into this dark recess, halted some twenty yards from the road to let the horsemen pass. His horse was hidden by shadows; but the little moon slid down between the evergreens and lit up the gay colours of the flag.

The raiders were riding recklessly, singing and shouting. They were hilarious with success. Two young fellows brought up the rear of the galloping column. A startled owl flapped over their heads, and one aimed his carbine at the slowly moving bird.

"Jim, if we'd no orders not to fire I'd bring down that fellow."

"If I wanted to shoot," returned Jim. "I'd take orders from no man. Hello! look into this path. Don't that look like the thing they call a flag up here?" He stopped his horse, raised a rifle and fired.

The two resumed their gallop and caught up with the main body. The captain looked back angrily, but did not stop to remonstrate. Already the sharp ear of Jean Bourdo had caught the sound of pursuing horses. They were only two miles from Canada line, when a troop of horsemen appeared on the brow of a hill a short distance behind them.

The robbers put spurs to their horses; the better animals responded, but some could not, and their riders were overtaken, made prisoners and part of the money recovered. The better mounted men escaped into Canada. They, too, were finally captured and most of the booty returned to the banks.

Jean Bourdo left the raiders before they were overtaken, and no one suspected his connection with the "St. Albans raid."

The next morning Jules was surprised to find his grey horse, more lame than usual, waiting at the stable door. The old clerk went to the Bourdo house to ask Pierre if he knew anything about it. The boy was missing. Jules thought his absence and the travelworn condition of the horse were in some way connected. He returned to his stable, and with patient care followed back the track of shoeless hoofs.

Slowly he traced the horse's path till he was led to the swamp beside the road. Here he found flag and boy, equally cold, and both pierced with rifle bullet.

In the evening a friend strolled into the lieutenant's quarters at the recruiting station. "Here's news," he announced. "Roughs from Canada have robbed the St. Albans banks. One villager was killed, and this morning a boy cripple, wrapped in a flag and shot through the heart, was found near the road by which the raiders returned to Canada."

"A crippled boy with a flag!" cried the officer. He threw away his cigar, and the next day he was moody and took little interest in the drilling.

The evergreen bushes stuck into the sand of the bay near the tamarack swamp dried and wilted, the plover uttered mournful cries, as they circled over the deserted beach, and the blue heron, wading along with drooping wings, found the old time relish for frogs was gone.

Plover Pierre had left them.

Francis S. Palmer.

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The Emperor's Whim.

CHAPTER I.

The Stolen Handkerchief.

Frederick William, first King of Prussia, had come from Potsdam to Magdeburg to inspect the ramparts of that town. Everywhere the windows were filled with curious spectators.

"Did you notice how hard the king looked at you, Krabb?" said a prominent citizen, named Wilmson.

"You mistake," replied Krabb; "His Majesty's eyes fell on yourself."

The old soldier was disputing the point, when he discovered that Wilmson, carried away by the crowd, had suddenly left him. He half-turned to the right, when a handsome young man touched his arm. It was the son of Mr. Wilmson, who seemed also looking out for someone he had lost in the crowd.

"Is it you, Mr. Fritz. Have you seen the king? You should have come with us."

"One word," said young Wilmson; "have you met a young lady dressed in black—a slight figure, of moderate height?"

"No," said Krabb.

Fritz started in pursuit of the lost fair one, the acquaintance with whom had been made after the following fashion. Curiosity led him into the midst of the crowd. Thinking that he might meet some one of his acquaintances there, he looked around; his eyes fell upon a young girl, covered with a long black veil, which, however, did not conceal two large, soft, brown eyes and an alabaster skin. Being before her, he very politely offered to exchange places. This offer was accepted. Fritz was enchanted to render this small service to so fair a creature. In spite of the long veil, he could see the massive braids of fair hair, and his eye rested admiringly on the beautiful outline of her figure.

"Did you see him well?" asked the girl, smiling with graceful frankness.

Fritz Wilmson trembled, and turned red as a corn poppy. "Did you see him well yourself?" he faltered out.

"Oh!" was the answer, "this is not the first time I have seen the king and his family. I thank you, however, for your civility."

She bowed, and was going away, when he made the remark that an arm might be acceptable, and offered her his. Too simple to see any danger, the young girl accepted it. They walked together thus through the crowd without speaking.

"But I live very far from here," she said at last; "I should be sorry to trouble you."

"I am too happy to accompany you, fräulein; but," he added confusedly, "I am at your orders, and if you wish I will leave you."

Suddenly she cried out, looking uneasily round.

"What has happened?" Fritz eagerly inquired.

"Someone in the crowd has snatched from me a handkerchief; it was embroidered by my mother."

"Walk on slowly, fräulein, I will overtake the thief." He left her. At the exclamation of the young girl, he noticed a man darting through an open space in the crowd. Wilmson hastened after him. The thief, in his turn, saw Wilmson, and took to his heels. As Fritz was gaining ground, he turned short and confronted the enemy.

"What do you want? Why do you follow me?" he asked, with the pocket-handkerchief still in his hand, which his rapid flight had prevented him from stowing away. Fritz, eager to carry his prize to the beautiful unknown, sprang at the handkerchief, and snatched it away.

In one of the corners of the handkerchief a purse was tied up, which explained the reason of the attempt. Wilmson hastened back to the principal street, already clear of the crowd. But, alas! the fair girl was nowhere to be seen.

CHAPTER II.

The Interview with the King.

On his return home, tired and discomfited, Fritz began to examine the handkerchief, in hope of discovering some mark which might give a clue to its owner. In one of the corners were the letters "C. de. St——" embroidered in blue silk.

It was the custom of Mr. Wilmson to pass the fine summer evenings in the garden, where, amid shady trees and flowers, a tasteful pavilion had been erected. It

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was there that Mr. Wilmson, M. de Moss, his sister. and Fritz were collected after dinner.

Suddenly, in the midst of their conversation, a servant opened the garden gate, and ushered in an officer. At this apparition everyone took a respectful attitude. Mr. Wilmson, the father, uncovered his head, and advanced towards the stranger, who bowed.

"The commandant of the town desires to speak to the elder Mr. Wilmson and his son. He orders you to be at his house by nine."

"I shall not fail. May I ask you the reason, sir?"

"I do not know; he has told me nothing. Good-night. To-morrow at nine."

When Mr. Wilmson and his son went to pay their visit to the commandant, they were ushered into a large room, magnificently furnished. Two grenadiers stood at the door on guard—officers of different regiments were grouped here and there. Some moments after, an officer entered, and asked if Mr. Wilmson and his son were there.

"Follow me," he said, introducing them into a small cabinet. "You, sir, the elder, enter first! the young man will wait."

Fritz had forgotten for a moment his fair unknown, but he saw several ladies now crossing the street in a post-chaise; one of them raised her eyes—it was the beautiful young girl in black. Fritz rushed to the window; she bent forward, and appeared to look at him attentively till she was out of sight.

"Heavens!" cried Fritz, "it is she! Is it necessary that I should be here?" And, turning towards the footman at hand, he asked if he knew who the young lady was.

"Certainly, Fräulein de St——"

He was about to question further, when his father re-entered the room.

"I cannot stay longer," he said, in a low voice; "return as soon as possible."

The door re-opened, and an orderly signed to Fritz to enter. The cabinet was filled with generals, all standing, with heads uncovered. One man alone remained seated by a table with his hat on. Young Wilmson recognised the king, and bowed. Frederick looked at him for a moment in silence, with a marked expression of kindness; then he turned to those nearest, and said:

"Not more than twenty—four years before him!" Then, addressing Fritz, he said: "Young man, what would you wish to be?"

"My father intends me to succeed him in commerce, but my inclination is for literature—to study."

"Pooh! pooh! You shall enter my guard at Potsdam—do you understand? If you conduct yourself well, I shall keep you only six weeks in the ranks; some men of education are wanted in my guard. Have you a wife?"

"Your Majesty——" stammered Fritz.

"Ah! you are silent. Beware of choosing a wife without my permission; leave it to me. Have you a taste for a soldier's profession?"

"No, sire; I wish to remain free."

"You know my will—I want not free men, but obedience—prepare for your journey to Potsdam."

"I shall defend my rights against violence; I will die rather than take the oath of service."

"What!" exclaimed the king, seizing his cane and threatening Wilmson. "You dare resist a king!" Then, turning towards the commandant, he exclaimed:

"Take that fellow to the barracks, and let him be watched. He shall go to-morrow with the transport. If he makes the least resistance, put him in chains. Go."

The king pointed towards the door. The commandant seized Wilmson's arm, and dragged him out.

CHAPTER III.

The Project Abandoned.

With a heavy heart young Wilmson walked through the streets of Magdeburg, between two guards.

Next morning, at daybreak, the recruits defiled on the bridge of the Elbe. Fritz, not to attract attention, had changed his elegant dress of the day before for a travelling suit. Near the end of the bridge, some one called him:

"My good Fritz, who could have expected this thunderbolt, all from your being so fine and tall a man? Alas! our good king's mania for giants!"

It was old Krabb. He had come to bid farewell to young Wilmson, and to accompany him part of the way. Fritz embraced the aged soldier; but sorrow prevented words—tears were in his eyes. The old man, unwilling to show his own emotion, growled out huskily:

"Thunder and lightning! I did not expect you would show yourself such an old woman. Come, sir, be a soldier"—and Krabb himself here lost voice, and left him.

The recruits were but a few days on the road. Arrived at Potsdam, they were passed in review, and drafted into various regiments. Wilmson entered the foot-guards, and, without loss of time, was drilled and taught the use of his weapons. He entered zealously into his duties, and soon became proficient. This goodwill gained him the captain's favour, together with his good looks and unmistakable gentlemanly bearing. His education and wealth enabled him in various ways to be useful to his captain and fellow-soldiers. His story spread abroad—it was no solitary instance—but none attracted such universal sympathy and interest. The colonel also conceived a great affection for him, and showed him signal favour; further, in three months' time, at the king's desire, they promoted him, and he became a sergeant. Meanwhile, Wilmson's deliverance seemed nigh. His father had arranged for his flight to Holland.

Everything was carefully planned. Krabb was to conduct Fritz from his lodgings to a neighbouring inn, where the disguises were to be in readiness. The same evening he hastened all joyful to Fritz's lodgings, and found him seated before a table, his head buried in his hands, dejected, and in a very taciturn mood.

The old man was astonished, and inquired the cause of the dejection.

"Krabb, my friend," said young Wilmson, "let me be; I am in an unfortunate position—I cannot go. I am bound here, and cannot break the chain. If I could I would not. Were the king himself to order my release I should still remain. Good-bye, my old friend. One day, perhaps, you will know all."

Krabb felt compelled to leave—Fritz was too firm for remonstrance.

Wilmson had his reasons for this sudden change. The night before he had kept midnight watch at the castle; afterwards the fancy seized him to take a walk. At the early hours of dawn he noticed a young woman dressed in black. The conviction flashed upon him that it was the beautiful unknown. On drawing nearer

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it was verified. He accosted her respectfully, and exclaimed:

"Can it be yourself, fräulein? Permit me to ask to what fortunate circumstances I owe the happiness of seeing you?"

"Sir, before answering your question, I must discharge my debt of thanks for the service you rendered me at Magdeburg."

"I greatly regretted my inability to restore the handkerchief of which I fortunately regained possession, but my researches were fruitless. I have it by me, together with the purse, which I shall be happy to leave at the address you may indicate. Might I further hope to learn from you whether you reside at Potsdam, or if this be but a casual visit?"

"My name is Clementine Sterne. Misfortunes have obliged me to accept a situation as companion in a nobleman's family in this town, where I have been residing within the last few days. But your own position seems equally changed—that uniform——"

"Alas! yes, fräulein, the king has made me a soldier, against my will."

Just then a general crossed the square on horseback; the soldiers turned out, and Fritz hastily left, to head the line. When the general had passed, Clementine, too, was gone.

It was this meeting that had caused Fritz's change of plan.

CHAPTER IV.

A Monarch's Whim.

One day the king was riding on horseback, with his generals, when he met on the road a very tall lady, who struck him by her height. He asked:

"Who is that giantess?"

"I remember to have seen," said one of his generals, "this beauty at Potsdam. She is governess in the family of a minister, whose name I forget. Of all the beauties of Potsdam she is head of the file."

"*Parbleu!*" exclaimed the king; "if she marries a man of her own size there will be the stock of a famous race."

Meanwhile the young lady came nearer. Her beauty was no less remarkable than her height. The king stopped his horse. She looked up and recognised the king.

"Young lady," said Frederick, "are you going to the town?"

Rather confused, she answered: "Yes."

"Do me the kindness to take a letter to the commandant."

The king asked for paper, and wrote a few lines whilst on horseback.

"You will give this note to the commandant. But tell me—are you married?"

She shook her head.

"Then you have a lover?"

The lady blushed.

"I understand—go. It is important this note be received immediately, and mark—ask for the commandant himself."

She bowed. Frederick galloped off, and the generals laughed at each other, guessing the contents of the letter. About half-an-hour after, an orderly went to Sergeant Wilmson with an order to present himself directly before the commandant. He was shown into a large room, where he found, besides the commandant, the colonel of the regiment and the captain of the battalion. All three wore a smile on their lips. This smile was a contrast to a woman's tears and sobs heard from a room adjoining.

"Wilmson," said the colonel, "I have agreeable news for you. It will make your comrades jealous. The king has found you a wife; nowhere, either at Potsdam, or at Berlin, could you find a lovelier."

"I will not marry her!" answered Wilmson.

"The king's order is plain. The girl is in the next room crying; it seems she has a lover. The chaplain is here; come, you must marry. Here is His Majesty's order, to the effect that Sergeant Wilmson be herewith, and without delay, united to the bearer of the order, in presence of the colonel; no attention to be paid to the objections of either party."

"Gentlemen, for the love of God, do not force me. You will cause the lifelong misery of two persons. Beware! for I am desperate. In spite of you and your king, I will be free!"

The commandant looked glum, went towards the door, and made a sign. Two under-officers of the guard entered—he whispered something, and they placed themselves on each side of the door. From the adjoining room were heard sobs.

"Confound it!" said the commandant, "this must end—chaplain, prepare."

He moved towards the adjoining room, and opened the door. A woman shrieked and cast herself at his feet. The colonel looked away. Wilmson saw and heard nothing.

"Come, my dear boy," the colonel said kindly, "resign yourself."

For the first time Wilmson noticed the chaplain, and, at his side, his destined bride, supported by two women. The two victims involuntarily glanced towards each other. Clementine—could Wilmson believe his eyes? Clementine herself, for one moment remained petrified; the next, a deep flush overspread her face, and then she fell down in a swoon.

"You have killed that poor girl," exclaimed Wilmson, "and now kill me."

Emotion overpowering him, he sank into a chair. No sooner did he open his eyes than the commandant called out:

"He will soon come to himself. Chaplain, unite them before Wilmson's senses quite return."

The chaplain obeyed. Paralysed, his eyes fixed on the still fainting Clementine, Wilmson no longer opposed the ceremony. The "yes" of either party was dispensed with, and the ring was passed for them. The commandant ordered a carriage to convey away the couple. The colonel drew Wilmson to him, who, still stunned, knew not what passed.

"Collect yourself, my son," he said; "the misfortune is great, but you were powerless to avoid it. This poor girl is now your wife; her position excites pity. Behave gently to her; her life hangs on a thread; a harsh word might kill her. Control yourself; promise me not to give way to despair."

Wilmson held out his hand to the good man, though he understood not a word.

The carriage drew up. At the commandant's order Clementine was conducted, or rather carried, to the carriage. Wilmson stepped in after her, and the coachman drove off.

"Is it, then, true?" he said at length, pressing Clementine's hand to his heart, and looking at her with fond delight. "Dear Clementine, if I dream, do not awaken me; if this be an illusion, oh! do not dispel it."

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Clementine gently withdrew her hand. The carriage stopped. Wilmson handed his wife out, and led her into his home. After ascending a few steps, she stopped.

"Mr. Wilmson, where am I?"

"In my house, dear Clementine. They have married us without our consent. I am yours; but I do not know how the king has guessed my dearest, my most secret wish. I have been entirely null in this affair, but our fate is irrevocably fixed."

Clementine hesitated; she ascended, nevertheless, but very slowly, and Wilmson opened the door of his room. She advanced timidly, standing in the middle of a large room elegantly furnished. Books, papers, flowers, music, were scattered on the tables and chairs.

"Ah, Clementine," said Wilmson, "when I left this room a quarter of an hour since, I did not expect to receive in it such a guest."

"Did you, indeed, know nothing of what was going to happen?" inquired Clementine. "Did you never mention to the colonel, or even to the king——"

"I have no part, I assure you, in this affair; I have never breathed your name."

"Then you are as unfortunate as myself: for Fräulein B—— was the bride destined for you. She little knew the contents of the letter she gave me."

Then he related to her the strange story of the last few months. Clementine listened astonished. She told him how she had come there, at the request of this tall lady whom she had not long made the acquaintance of. Whether pressed for time, or for reasons of her own, she would not go to the commandant's house, and she begged Clementine to deliver the letter in her stead. The commandant told her that it was an order to unite her immediately to a man in the guards. Clementine affirmed there was some mistake; the letter had been given to her by a lady. They only laughed. The colonel and the chaplain were summoned, and she had fainted in her distress.

This gave the key to the enigma.

"Then it was not you," he said, "who were intended? You are my wife against the king's will! Never king was so well served."

Clementine made a step towards the door.

"Would you leave me—would you undo what Providence has so miraculously brought about?" said Fritz. "Potsdam already knows this strange adventure, and that you are my wife. Ah, Clementine, where will you go? Am I, then, so distasteful? Do I inspire no faith?"

She looked shyly at him, then held out her hand.

"I have faith in you," she said, "but not in our happiness. Oh, if you knew—you were my only friend on earth. I have always——" The words died on her lips.

Wilmson, in ecstasy, clasped her to his heart, exclaiming—"Mine for ever!" She murmured a very low assent. Suddenly a terrible thought struck her.

"The king's will," she said, "may as suddenly end our happiness."

"Do not fear, Clementine; the king is good; he will not separate us. If so, however, we can make our escape. Any hour my old friend Krabb will come and help our flight."

While they were talking, some one knocked at the door. It was a messenger with an order from the king. Wilmson was commanded to present himself at the castle with his bride. They both felt alarmed, but no time was allowed them for reflection.

Clementine trembled violently. Wilmson whispered courage, but his voice was ill-assured. Arrived at the castle, an ominous silence met them; at intervals broken, however, by the terrible tones of a voice in a distant apartment. The voice was Frederick's. Among the officers assembled in the waiting-room was the colonel. He went up immediately to Wilmson.

"Well, my son, your lot is fixed. The king is furious with the commandant. He had destined for you another bride, a tall and beautiful girl he met that very morning during his ride. A mistake has been made; the king pities you and wants to see you."

When the newly-married pair were ushered in, Frederick fixed a searching glance on Clementine. She looked ready to sink. Wilmson's anxiety was apparent.

"Did you not declare to the commandant," said the king, harshly addressing her, "that you had received that letter from another lady?"

"Sire, I repeated it a hundred times," faltered Clementine, collecting her remaining strength; "but no one listened."

The king paced up and down the apartment, then abruptly stopped short before Wilmson.

"I am very sorry, my poor fellow," he said kindly. "What shall I do for you now? My intention in giving you a wife was not to render you miserable. Listen. I wish you well; ask a favour, and it is granted. But I cannot break the tie which binds you—it would be contrary to the Divine law. What would you have?"

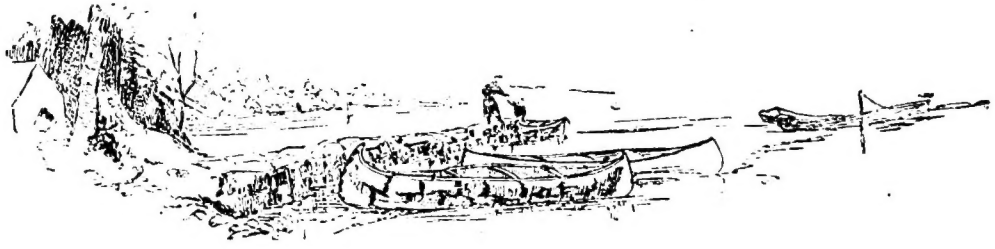
Wilmson did not hesitate.

"Sire, my freedom—my discharge!"

The king, who was unprepared for this, made a gesture of displeasure; but after a moment's silence, he said to Wilmson:

"A king cannot retract—you are free!"

GREGORY GALTON.



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A CHILD OF TO-DAY.

MY little neighbour, Bettina, came in one evening and said imperiously: "Tell me a story."

"Certainly," I said; "sit down and I will begin. 'Once upon a time, a long, long time ago——'"

"I don't like 'a long, long time ago,' that's the way grandma's stories always begin, and you're not as old as grandma, and can't know anything about 'a long, long time ago.' Tell me something else."

"Very well," I said submissively, "I know a very pretty story about a little girl who was one day out in the fields gathering flowers, and as she was sauntering along——"

"She met a little old woman, who said to her, 'little girl'—I know all that, the little girl and the little old woman always say the same things, and the little old woman always turns out to be a fairy and the little girl always marries the prince. I don't want to marry a prince; my papa says there isn't a prince living his papa couldn't buy up three times over——"

"Bettina," I gasped.

"And as for fairies I've been in the fields often, and I've never met any fairies, big or little."

"And what's more, Bettina," I said, shaking my head at her sadly, "you never will."

"No, and I don't want to; they always say such foolish things, like the stupid old giants. I'm sick of giants! I saw one once in a show, and he didn't eat up anybody or say 'fee, fo, fi, fum' down in his shoes like the books say: he just stood up there and let people look at him like a piece of wood. He wasn't worth paying sixpence to see. Tell me a story, please."

"But it is so hard to tell you a story; there are so many things you don't like. Let me see—shall I tell you about the man in the moon?"

"There isn't any man in the moon; there's nothing but dried up lakes and rocks there, and all sorts of dead things."

"Oh?"

"And I don't want to hear about Father Christmas, because I know who Father Christmas is, and anyhow he couldn't get down the chimney through the grate, because the grate's too little."

"Well, then, there is the rabbit that comes on Easter——"

Bettina's lip curled scornfully. "Why I get the dye for the eggs myself?"

"Red Ridinghood——"

"Pooh? Who ever heard a wolf talk? Did you?"

"No," I said feebly; "but they sometimes bite."

"Course they do."

"Then," I said desperately, "suppose you tell me a story."

This idea seemed to please her. She leant back complacently in her chair and folded her hands in her lap. Her hair fell on her shoulders like yellow silk, her skin was pink, her eyes blue, and her little form clad in costly clothes, made in the picturesquely simple fashion of long ago. An ideal looking child, aureoled by the setting sun.

"Well," she began, in a quick, monotonous tone, pitching her voice a key higher than usual, "there's a man lives next door to us named Smith—you've seen him?"

"He has a wife and she's named Smith."

"You've seen her?"

"Yes."

"And they've got five children—Anna Smith, Fanny Smith, Tommy Smith, Georgie Smith. You've seen them?"

"Yes."

"And a baby—you've seen it?"

"Yes."

"But the baby hasn't been christened yet; and when it cries it goes 'wha-an, wha-an, wha-an,' and it's got blue eyes and no hair, and they've got a dog—you've seen it?"

"No."

"Named Bruno, and every time the baby goes out the dog goes with it, and they always know when the baby's coming home, because the dog comes in first; and they've got a cow, and a cat that's too old to catch rats, and mamma says she doesn't know why they keep it because it costs something to feed it, but the children are very fond of it; and they've got a cook and a girl, but they haven't got a nurse, and they haven't got a carriage 'cause they're too poor to keep one, and mamma says they're not the kind of people she wants to lend ours to.

"I don't know why—'cause their shoes are clean and their clothes are nice, though they don't cost as much as mine—and they've got nice hats—Anna's hat's got pink flowers on it, and Fanny's hat's got blue flowers, and Georgie's hat's got red flowers, and the baby's got a lace cap all full of frills, and every one of them, 'cepting the baby, have had the measles, and croup, and mumps, and whooping cough, and earache, and toothache, and scarlet fever; and Tommy's cut his finger often, and Fanny once ran a needle in hers, and Georgie fell down and broke a tooth, and Anna hurt her foot so she couldn't walk for a week, and Mrs. Smith has headaches sometimes, and so does Mr. Smith, and this morning the girl broke a new dish they'd just bought, and Mrs. Smith said she was going to take it out of her wages, and Mr. Smith said she'd better not 'cause she might leave, and it's so hard to get good girls, so Mrs. Smith didn't do it, and Anna and Georgie say they're glad 'cause they like the girl. I think she's named Susan, and she's got a sister named Mary, and a brother named Bob. I've never seen them, but Anna says so, and—but it's getting late, I think I'd better be going."

"But the end of your story, Bettina?"

Bettina opened her eyes very wide and stared at me. "The end?" she exclaimed; "there isn't any end. The Smiths are still next door to us, and I expect they're going on living there as long as they pay their rent. Perhaps they'll die some day, but I suppose they won't 'less they catch something. There's Venus, the evening star, and Jupiter's the morning——"

"Good-night, Bettina," I interposed hastily; "good-night."

As I watch her little form vanishing across the lawn I sighed for the children that are no more, and for the good old fables that have been swallowed up by facts.

HORACE S. LEFTWICH.

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THE GREAT MIDDLEWICK BANK ROBBERY

SUMMARY.

Mr. Bryant, *Manager of Middlewick Bank.*
Mr. Herbert Stewart, *Cashier.*
Mr. Rutherford, *Book-keeper.*
Mr. Alfred Taylor, *Detective.*
John Warren, *Old Watchman.*
Jack Burton, *New Watchman.*
Miss Denton, *Bryant's niece, and in love with Rutherford.*

£20,000 is stolen from the Bank one night while John Warren is asleep. The only persons apparently aware of the key to the combination lock are Mr. Bryant and Mr. Stewart. Taylor interviews Mr. Bryant and the new watchman, Jack Burton, who, by his movements, appears to be a colleague of Taylor, unknown to Mr. Bryant.

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Taylor has to Run for it.

The night was balmy, with a gentle breeze blowing. It had been showery during the day so that the new moon was partially concealed by flying clouds which rendered its light treacherous and uncertain.

Alfred Taylor was in Middlewick in the character of a commercial traveller for a large clothing company. Indeed, it may be said that the character was not wholly assumed. A certain firm in the Metropolis had more than once experienced the benefit of his services in this direction. The head of the establishment was an old school friend of Taylor's, and when an order signed "A. Rollett" was received, he well knew from whom it came.

Taylor declined to receive the commission he thus well earned, but he could not always refuse the handsome suits sent to his residence by the wealthy clothing firm. In the course of the day, "Mr. Rollett" took three moderate orders in Middlewick and forwarded them to London. When night came, he resumed operations in another line. It has been intimated that Middlewick was not altogether unknown to him. Although few perhaps recalled the fact, only a couple of years previously he had spent a week there when engaged upon a counterfeiting case.

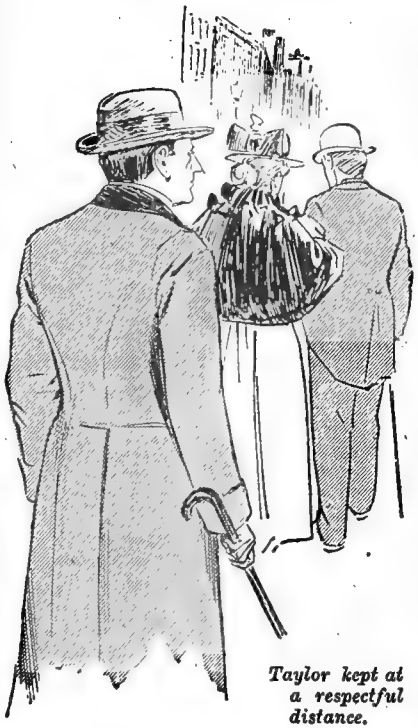
During the afternoon he strolled through the town, loitering on the outskirts for the purpose of ascertaining "how the land lay." He discovered the handsome residence of the bank manager and the more modest homes of the book-keeper and cashier. When night closed in, he was more familiar with the town than were a great many people who had spent their lives there.

Leaving the hotel, he sauntered along the High Street as though out for a stroll before turning in for the night. As was his custom, he carefully scrutinised every person he met, for a person following his profession must be observant at all times to save himself from going astray. There was little to excite interest, though hardly a face was lost upon him.

Suddenly he met a couple who at once arrested his attention.

They were Frank Rutherford, the book-keeper of the bank, and Mr. Bryant's niece, May Denton. So absorbed were they in each other, that he had no doubt of the lady's identity, and, confident of remaining unnoticed, he turned round and strolled after them.

The detective had no means of ascertaining whence they came, but judged that they had been spending the evening with a friend and that Mr. Rutherford was now escorting his betrothed to her home.



Taylor kept at a respectful distance.

Taylor managed to approach near enough to overhear some of their conversation, but they were talking in low tones, and most of what they said was lost. Turning into the quiet and more fashionable streets, they soon reached Mr. Bryant's residence. Few people were about at that hour, and he placed himself near the couple.

The detective of a story usually manages to get sufficiently close to the suspected parties to catch everything said without being observed, but, in real life, such an exploit is rarely accomplished, for the reason that a man or woman needs only to be on guard to frustrate the attempt.

If the couple had spoken in a little louder tones, or had their faces been turned towards instead of away from the officer, he might have kept the thread of their conversation, but had they faced him they would have immediately noticed his attempt to play the eavesdropper.

The lovers walked slowly while Taylor kept at a respectful distance intently listening and on the watch.

"Can it be possible, Frank?"

As the young lady asked this question, she turned her head sideways and looked up in the face of her companion. The words reached the detective distinctly, but the tones of Rutherford were lower and deeper.

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He glanced away, as though he saw something . . . across the street.

Taylor did not catch his answer but was quite sure it was in the affirmative for the girl quickly used the feminine expression: "It is awful. I would rather die."

Again Rutherford's response was inaudible; then they walked on in silence until "Glenmora" was reached.

The depression evident on both their faces must have had another cause than their parting, which was for but a few hours. That cause, Taylor decided, could be but one—the bank robbery.

"They may have conspired to take the money for themselves and now that the deed is done are filled with alarm, and perhaps remorse. Consummated crime is not half as rosy as imagination paints it."

The moon came out from behind the clouds and showed Charles Bryant smoking on the verandah. He was evidently waiting for his niece.

Seeing him, and in view of the lateness of the hour, Rutherford parted with his *fiancée* at the gate, instead of accompanying her to the door. Mr. Bryant waved his hand in salutation to his employé, who returned it in a somewhat more subdued style, but neither spoke.

"I hope he doesn't recognise me," thought Taylor, who had made a few unimportant changes in his personal appearance. "Rutherford is more likely to identify me."

The halt of the young couple for a few seconds at the gate caused the detective to pass close by them. While doing so he glanced away, as though he saw something which interested him across the street. There was silence between them while he was nearest them, but just before he came up and immediately after they exchanged a few sentences.

"You haven't uttered a word, Frank, to anyone?"

"No, and shall not."

"Do you think *he* suspects?"

"I am sure he does not."

"You are certain there is nothing in your manner likely to arouse his suspicions?"

"I could not be more careful. Little does he think that I never slept a wink last night, and will not fare much better to-night."

"Be sure to rest in the day then. You must not let your health suffer, you——"

These were the last words that Taylor caught. He heard the murmur of voices, but nothing further intelligible. Still looking across the street, as though his interest centred there, he was able, over his shoulder, to watch the lovers.

Miss Denton, after bidding her escort an affectionate good-night, passed through the gate which he held open for her. He lifted his hat, turned round and walked rapidly towards his home. The detective would have been glad to follow him, for he was in the mood to believe that the least trifle might give him one of the clues that he was seeking. Such a course, however, would have been imprudent. Rutherford would notice the act, and it would arouse his suspicion. The first duty of the detective in shadowing a person is to make certain that he himself is neither shadowed nor an object of suspicion to the one under surveillance.

Taylor walked on until he arrived at Cross Street. A few minutes brought him within a stone's throw of Rutherford's abode. Sauntering along in the same aimless manner, Taylor remained upon the opposite side of the street with

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his whole attention fixed upon the cottage where lived the suspected young man.

No one was in sight. The lower part of the house was in darkness, but a light shone from the upper front room. A quick glance to right and left showed Taylor that he was still alone. Stepping back into the shadow of the doorway of a shop, where the glare of the street lamp could not reach him, the detective waited and watched. If the young man was in his room, the light would soon be extinguished; if it continued, he was not there. The blind was down so that even had the position of the watcher been more favourable, he could not have caught a glimpse of the interior.

Five, ten minutes passed, and there was no change. Then the shadow of a person suddenly appeared on the blind, passing across it like a figure on a magic-lantern slide, but it was a woman's form. Brief as was the glance he caught, the watcher recognised it as the outline of an elderly person.

"It's his mother," was the conclusion, "she is waiting for him."

As if in confirmation, the blind was now hastily drawn up and the figure of the old lady was seen for a minute as she looked out on the still, spring night. Her action was that of one expecting the coming of someone who came not.

Taylor shrank back, though he knew it was impossible for anyone in her position to see him. The woman waited but a moment, and then withdrew after pulling down the blind.

"He hasn't returned home. Where can he be?"

Manifestly nothing was to be gained by staying where he was in the shadow of the door, so Taylor decided to carry out the original purpose he had in view when he left the hotel. He took a step forward, but as he did so, someone approached and he drew back. It was a policeman not a dozen paces distant. The detective was annoyed for this boded trouble. His position was such that the officer was likely to call him to account and probably take him into custody. Nothing serious would result beyond inconvenience and delay. If he were compelled to give an account of himself, and it should not prove satisfactory, he had only to appeal to Mr. Bryant, whose word would secure his release, but to be locked up would interfere with several plans he had in mind.

The lumbering policeman rushed after him.

He therefore shrank back as far as he could in the shadow of the door, hoping the guardian of the peace would pass him unnoticed. So he did, in his slow swinging step, looking neither to the right nor to the left and probably seeing nothing. All would have gone well but for an unexpected occurrence. The officer had passed a little way when the window directly above Taylor's head was raised.

"Hi, there," called out a guarded voice to the policeman. He stopped short and looked in the direction whence the voice came.

"What is it?" he asked.

"He's in the doorway below."

"Who?"

"The burglar; he's been there half-an-hour trying to pick my lock. Quick, and you've got him!"

His eyes were fixed on the entrance to the bank.

Taylor was plainly in for it. He saw he must do one of two things. Wait and quietly surrender, with a night's incarceration as a certainty, or make a dash for liberty. On a spurt he could run a short distance with anyone, and so decided on the latter course. Darting out of the door, he sped down the street like a deer. A couple of shrill whistles, and the lumbering policeman rushed after him. The fugitive knew he could distance his pursuer in a fair race, but he dreaded being stopped by the other officers who were sure to be attracted by the whistling. His previous acquaintance with the town now served him well. After running a short way he darted across the street. As in a dream he noticed the raising of windows, the thrusting out of heads, and the excitement caused by the whistle, but he was fast gaining on his pursuer.

Darting round the first corner, he slowed down to a walk. He was in danger of meeting some other policeman who, if he saw him running, would certainly call him to account. A quick glance showed Taylor that his fears had been ungrounded, and he indulged in another run that quickly took him to the next corner which he passed at the same deliberate pace as before. It was well he did so, for within a yard or two he came face to face with a blue-coated officer.

The latter scrutinised him sharply, and to forestall any troublesome questions, the detective remarked:

"I think I heard a whistle. Did you notice it?"

"Where have you come from, young man?" asked the policeman in turn, not fully satisfied with his question.

"I came from round the corner."

"Well, what's your name then?"

"I'm Alfred Rollett, commercial traveller for the best clothing firm in the United Kingdom. If you can help me get the order for the suits of the Force in Middlewick, I'll make it all right with you. Do you think it worth your while?"

"Go on with you," replied the constable, hastening in the direction indicated.

Taylor resumed his walk and was soon beyond danger of further molestation.

A quarter of an hour later he passed slowly by the bank which had been the scene of so striking an occurrence less than forty-eight hours before. This was the objective point of his excursion.

Glancing up and down the street, he paused for a moment, but just then a pedestrian came in sight walking quickly. Taylor continued his stroll until the stranger disappeared,

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when he stood still for a minute, looking keenly up and down the street. The coast at last seemed clear and he again walked briskly towards the bank. When opposite, he glanced sharply to right and left, and gave a low whistle, to which the response was immediate and satisfactory.

CHAPTER IV.

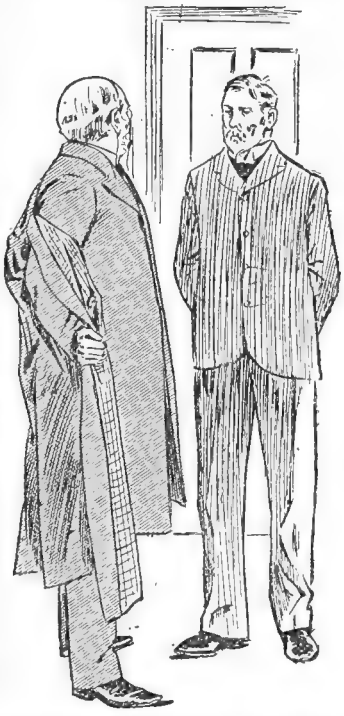
"Sh!"

The reply to the detective's guarded signal was a soft, creaking sound, as if made by the cautious opening of a door. His eyes were fixed on the entrance to the bank under the glare of the street lamp. He was not mistaken when he fancied he saw one half move gently inwards, as if drawn by the hand of a person standing behind it. Taylor whistled softly again, and the door moved back further, dimly showing the face of a man through the opening.

The detective stepped briskly up the stone steps, and into the bank as though he were the shadow of one of the drifting clouds overhead. Then the door once more closed behind him, and the key grated gently in the lock.

"It's all right," whispered the new watchman; "I've been on the look-out for you for some time, and I made sure no one saw you."

The man led the way to the manager's room, where, as in various other parts of the bank, a dim light was burning. The blinds were down, so that the sharpest eyes could detect nothing from the outside. Seating themselves by the table, the two men began to talk softly together. Not once did their voices reach the pitch that anyone attempting to listen from the street could have caught the faint hum and murmur of the speakers.



Commenced pulling off his overcoat.

For fully half-an-hour their conversation continued. Had Mr. Bryant known of it he would certainly have doubted the detective's singleness of purpose when he so heartily assured him he had done the right thing in accepting Burton on the mere strength of a written testimonial.

The couple were still talking when both were startled by someone fumbling at the outer lock, as if seeking admittance. As would have been natural, the two men, after the first shock, were as cool as before.

"That's the Manager," said Burton.

"It will hardly do for him to find me here," observed the detective, glancing round for some place of concealment; "I'll wait in there till he's gone," he added, pointing to the cupboard in which he had taken refuge that same afternoon.

He stepped inside and drew the door after him.

"He may take a fancy to look in there," remarked the watchman, turning, as he spoke, the key in the lock, and placing it in his pocket. Then he went to the front door, where the fumbling at the lock was still plainly audible. Whoever the visitor was he could not open the door, for the good reason that the watchman's key was on the inside.

"Who's there?" Burton demanded in a gruff tone.

"It is I, Mr. Bryant," was the reply.

"Step back from the door so that I can have a look at you," demanded Burton. "I must know it's you before you come in here at this time of night."

The Manager did as requested and the watchman recognised him—as, in fact, he had done the moment he spoke. The key was turned and once more the door was drawn inward.

"Have you anybody with you?" the watchman asked, peering out into the dimly-lighted street.

"I am alone."

The guardian of the building relocked the door and then faced his superior with a look and manner which plainly asked his business in coming to the bank at that unseemly hour.

"I am so disturbed over the robbery," Mr. Bryant explained, "that I cannot sleep. You will excuse me when I say that, despite the high recommendations you brought, I did not feel quite easy concerning you. I therefore decided to come down and see how things are for myself."

As he spoke, he walked to his room, and took the very chair that had been occupied a few minutes before by the detective who was now concealed within half-a-dozen feet of him.

"Well, and are you satisfied?" inquired the watchman with the assurance of a man who knows that there can be but one answer to his question.

"Quite," replied the Manager, leaning back in his chair with a weary air. "That was a good idea of yours making me step away so that you could see me before allowing me to enter."

"Yes, a good thing for you."

"What do you mean?"

"Had you not done as I requested, I would have opened the door about a couple of inches and put a bullet through you."

"But supposing there had been two or three of us?"

"Each of the five chambers of my revolver is loaded. I don't think I would have missed with them all."

The self-confidence with which this was said won the admiration of the manager.

"You'll do," was his comment. "If Warren had been half as watchful last night, the Middlewick Bank would be better off by twenty thousand pounds than it is at present."

As Mr. Bryant spoke, he commenced pulling off his overcoat. As was his custom, he stepped to the cupboard to hang it on one of the pegs within. He evidently intended to spend a considerable time at the bank.

"Bless me," he exclaimed, on finding the door locked; "that is too bad, but I have a key in my pocket." He drew out a bunch and tried one after another, while the detective on the inside prepared himself for the meeting. The watchman waited with a grim smile, carefully concocting the exclamation he intended giving at the presence of his visitor when he should be discovered.

But none of the keys fitted, and Mr. Bryant returned them to his pocket.

"It makes no difference," he remarked, proceeding to don his coat again, with the watchman's assistance. "There's no occasion for me to stop here.

"Come and lock the front door after me. I'm satisfied with you."

The watchman did as requested, bade his employer "good-night," locked the big front door behind him, and then returned and released the detective.

"Confound it," exclaimed the latter, as he stepped into view, with a flushed face. "If I'd been in there ten minutes longer it would have been a choice between kicking the door

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open or smothering to death. The old fellow would have been startled, but I think we could have satisfied him everything was all right."

"There would have been but little trouble about that. You could have pleaded the same errand as he, and that,

It was a letter.

on hearing me open the door to someone you slipped in there to note what might be said. But it would have been awkward to have explained how the key came to be lost and why you didn't come forth on finding who the caller was. On the whole, I am glad he didn't discover you."

"So am I," assented the detective.

Instead of departing, as it would seem Taylor might have done, now that his business with the watchman was finished, he resumed his former seat, and the two continued to smoke until past midnight. Finally, the detective arose, yawned, flung away his cigar, and said he would go back to the hotel where he had engaged quarters the night before.

The two strolled leisurely from the manager's room along the open space behind the counter and paused a few minutes in front of the heavy outer doors. It was profoundly still, and they spoke in even lower tones than they were accustomed to use.

"Sh!" suddenly exclaimed the watchman, raising his hand, "there's someone on the steps again." The noise was faint, but both heard the cautious footsteps of a person walking up the three steps that led to the bank entrance.

They were all attention, when an almost inaudible rustling caught their ears. Still listening intently, the watchman suddenly gripped the arm of his companion and pointed to the bottom of the door. Something white gleamed there, and was coming into plainer view each moment. It was a letter which someone was stealthily pushing under the door from outside.

"Quick! Be ready to follow him," whispered Burton.

The watchman quickly turned the big key and drew back the heavy door of the bank, but, despite long practice, there was necessarily a slight delay, for such heavy objects cannot be snatched to and fro like ordinary doors.

Without stopping to notice the letter at his feet, the detective rushed through the opening directly it was presented and was soon outside.

He expected to see the fleeing figure, but a hasty glance round showed no one in sight. He stood irresolute, undecided what to do.

Meanwhile the watchman had been more observant. Middlewick Bank stood at a corner. The party who pushed the letter under the door completed the action before the watchman turned the key. Indeed he must have been moving off even as the grating sound warned him of his danger. Instead of darting up, down or across the street, he whisked round the corner.

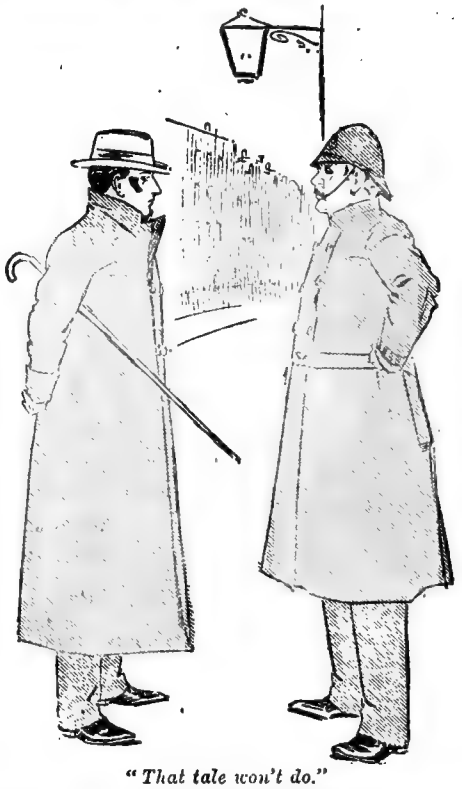
Fearful lest the detective should blunder, Burton thrust his head through the partly open door and called: "He's gone to the left. Quick and you'll catch him."

"Why didn't I think of that?" muttered Taylor, following the proffered advice.

The faint moonlight and the nearest lamp gave out slight illumination, but he caught a glimpse of a shadowy figure vanishing in the distance, and was after it like a deer. The detective had little doubt of his ability to run down any ordinary fugitive.

But the race had barely begun when it ended. Before the pursuer had well seen his man, he was out of sight. Thinking he might have darted into a doorway, or behind some object for concealment, the detective continued, though at a moderate pace. Suddenly he observed someone coming towards him sauntering slowly along. Taylor instantly slowed down to an ordinary walking pace, his purpose being not to alarm the other into a renewal of his flight.

The newcomer proved to be one of the town police, his height, looks and manner proving he was not the individual whom the detective was so anxious to meet.



"That tale won't do."

"Would you be kind enough to tell me whether you saw a man running just now?" asked Taylor courteously.

"Yes, sir, I did," was the gruff response.

"Where is he—which way did he go?"

"The chap I saw running is the one that I'm talking to,

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and I want to know what's the meaning of it all? If I ain't mistaken, I've met you before, sir."

"Perhaps you did, but I saw a suspicious-looking fellow a few minutes ago who I think was after my watch."

"That tale won't do," warned the policeman. "I'll let you off this time, but if you don't go straight home, I'll run you in at once."

"You're rather down on a man," said the detective, assuming a meekness which he was far from feeling, "but I'll take your advice. Good-night."

"It's just as well for you," said the constable, walking on in the direction of the bank.

The detective saw that he had made a bad impression and he dared not return to the watchman until he was sure the way was clear. Evidently the policeman was only too anxious to carry out his threat if he only could find an excuse for doing so.

But it was easy for the detective to avoid another meeting with him. He turned into a by-street, going over the route he had traversed several times that evening, until, confident that the way was once more clear, he came back to the vicinity of the bank.

The watchman was on the look-out for him. Once more the signal was promptly answered by the opening of the door, and, as cleverly as before, he entered the building, where the couple again made their way to the room they had lately occupied.

"What a blunder," exclaimed Taylor, as he dropped into a chair. "Instead of darting round the corner, the instant I was outside, I stood staring like an idiot, until the fellow had time to get beyond my reach."

"Did you see nothing of him?"

"Only a parting glimpse, and the next minute I barely missed running into a policeman. Do you think he could have been the one who put the letter under the door?"

"Policemen have been known to be mixed up in all sorts of shady affairs, but the man whom I saw bolt round the corner was not an officer."

"Did you see him?"

"No, it wasn't necessary to do so to be sure of that. Those men wear heavy boots, and some few of them can run on a spurt, but this man, whoever he was, had on slippers. He may have darted into some opening door which was waiting for him, in case of danger."

"But what about the letter?"

The watchman had already broken the seal and read the missive. He passed it to the detective, who, turning up the light, read the following:

Mr. Manajer Brient or hum it mai consern.

Weeve got the twenti thowsand pounds, and you can wisel for it. Barf a lofe is beter than know bred, and if yule call orf yore dogs and akt squar, weel giv yu bak 3 parts of the swag. Thats leting you orf cheep, & the onli chans yule ever get of geting any of the chink bak agane. If you agree, mark a cross in chawk on the front of the bauk dore after bizness ours. It need not be a bigg won too attrakt attenshun; weel see it and akt squar. If yu dount, yoov seene the larst of yer thowsands, and its know gude tri-ing enny trix on us.

WUN OF EM.

"That shows," remarked Taylor, "that in spite of the cleverness of the job, they're novices to this business."

"What makes you think that?" inquired the watchman.

"Why do they offer to return three parts of the plunder after saying that they have it all so secure that it cannot be taken from them? It shows that they are afraid of being caught and are anxious to compromise the matter."

"Perhaps in some way they have discovered that their friend, Detective Taylor, has taken charge of the business," replied the watchman with a smile.

"If that were the case, they would withdraw the offer after my performance this evening. No, it's a blind; but can you make anything of the handwriting?"

"It's disguised, of course, and the spelling is too bad to be genuine. Here, wait a second."

Taking out his penknife the watchman drew the keen blade along the crease made by folding the letter and handed one half to the detective.

"That'll be enough for you. I'll see what I can do with the rest."

Each carefully folded and put away his portion. The detective also appropriating the envelope.

"Time's getting on," said the latter, once more rising to his feet. "I'll go to the hotel. If anything turns up, you can come and see me there. Probably I'll be here to-morrow night."

"Wait a minute," said the watchman, walking to the front door with the detective. "It would be rather awkward for you to run into that policeman again. Let's reconnoitre a bit." Each approached a window, and moved the blinds so as to peep out without being observed.

"Alf," whispered Burton a minute later. "Look over at the other corner and tell me whether there is anyone there."

The detective did so, and a minute later answered: "There's a man standing there."

"And he's watching the bank. I shouldn't be surprised if he is the gentleman who beat you in the race a little while ago."

"If that's the case, I will try it again," remarked the detective, fixing his gaze upon the opposite corner.

(To be continued.)

RESULT OF PICTURE-PUZZLE.

The Puzzle Picture which appeared in *Short Stories*, dated February 22nd, appears to have been as difficult of solution as its predecessor was easy. The consequence is that no one has been successful in putting all the parts of the picture together in their correct places. The gentleman coming nearest the solution is Mr. H. S. Uhlrich, Bryntirion, Chelsfield, Kent, whose attempt has eleven squares in the wrong places, and a cheque for £10 has been forwarded to him. The competitors, whose names are appended, have succeeded in getting within eighteen squares, or fewer, of the correct solution, and to each of them a gold-plated pencil-case has been awarded as a consolation prize.

W. J. Eglinton, Esq., 2, Burtop Rd., Lower Tooting; Mrs. A. Heath, 203, Farrant Avenue, Noel Pk., Wood Gn.; A. Sproat, 17, Elm Grove, Eccles New Rd., Weaste, Manchester; V. Tudor, 29, Fordingley Rd., Paddington, W.; Mrs. Armstrong, 17, Elm Grove, Eccles New Rd., Weaste, Manchester; B. Green, 57, Albert Mansions, South Lambeth Rd., S.W.; J. Boyle, 15, Union Pl., Perth Rd., Dundee; C. H. Fisher, 127, Mornington Rd., Leytonstone; Miss E. Fisher, 127, Mornington Rd., Leytonstone; G. Smith, 39, Roseville Terrace, Roundhay Rd., Leeds; Miss B. Doyle, 9, Waverley Rd., Harrow Rd., Paddington; Miss M. A. Smith, 110, Palace Gar. Terr., W.; W. Elliot, 6, Greek St., Soho Sq., W.; F. W. Leurs, Oswald Rd., Oswestry, Salop; F. Hodge, 1, Springfield Gar., Upper Clapton; J. G. Moore, 5, London Grange, Princes Rd., Liverpool; Master F. Prichett, 41, Crozier St., Lambeth; D. Denholm, 153, West George St., Glasgow; R. Robertson, 167, Perth Rd., Dundee; J. R. Parker, 77, Brackenbury Rd., Preston, Lancashire; M. Parker, 77, Brackenbury Rd., Preston, Lancashire; J. A. Kennedy, 11, Blindgate St., Coleraine, Ireland; W. Davis, 41, Shankhill Rd., Belfast; T. Alexander, 2, Astbury Rd., S.E.; G. Stenlake, 9, Paradise Pl., Stoke, Devonport; W. G. Brown, 364, West Green Rd., Tottenham; Mrs. E. Brooks, 32, Claremont Rd., Alexandra Pk., Manchester; W. Matthes, 9, Regina Rd., Tollington Pk., London; J. King, 25, Belfast St., West Brighton; G. S. L. Gore, 23, Gay St., Bath.

84	56	42	20	26	59	28	45
12	32	64	22	86	40	29	67
27	60	52	21	31	19	4	14
69	34	63	82	9	62	64	47
28	3	37	76	23	7	87	85
36	53	50	17	30	2	79	70
73	55	24	38	6	57	16	81
8	46	44	25	42	77	39	66
13	1	51	43	18	88	10	24
71	48	41	5	58	61	80	74
15	11	68	83	33	78	54	62

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LEGENDS OF WOLFVILLE.

BY "DAN QUINN."

Wolfville is a Cattleman's Settlement in Arizona, and the Characters in these Legends are Cowboys.

No. 8.—The Story of Wilkins.

"No; I don't reckon I ever cuts the trail of this yere Wilson you mentions once. If I does, the fact's done pulled its picket pin, an' strayed from my recollections."

I had recalled the name of a former friend, one Wilson, who, sore given to liquor, had drifted to Arizona many years before and disappeared. Suggesting the name to the old cattle-man, I had asked if he had met such a name and character in his Wolfville rambles, and received the above reply.

As often chanced, however, the question bore fruit in a story. It frequently needed but a slight blow from the rod of casual inquiry, and the fountains of my old friend's reminiscences gushed forth.

"No, I never crosses up with him," observed the old cattle-man; "but speakin' of Wilson puts in my mind a gent by the name of Wilkins, who, it's some likely, is as disrepootable as your old pard Wilson."

"What about Wilkins?" I asked. "Any story with him?"

"Nothin' thrillin'," answered the old gentleman; "nothin' you'd stay up nights to hear, I don't reckon. It's Wilkins' daughter who's the only redeemin' thing about the old Cimmarron; an' it's a heap likely right now it's her I remembers about instead of him.

"Not at all," he continued. "I don't mind onfoldin' as to Wilkins, nor yet of an' concernin' his daughter. You see, this Wilkins is herdin' round Wolfville when I first trails in. I never does know where he hails from. I don't reckon, though, that he ever does grade no ways high, an' at the crisis I'm mentionin' his speshul play is gettin' drunk mostly, an' not allowin' to hurt himself none with work.

"'Workin' with your fins,' says Wilkins, 'is low an' onendoorin' to a gent with pride to wound. It ain't no use, neither. I knows folks as works an' folks as don't, an' you can't tell one from which. They gets along entirely similar.'

"'But how you goin' to live?' says Dave Tutt, when he makes this remark once, an' who is fussin' with Wilkins for bein' so ridiculous and shiftless.

"'That's all right about my livin',' says Wilkins; 'don't you all pass restless nights on my account. Go read your Scriptures; read that bluff about feedin' the young ravens an' sparrows. Well, that's me this trip. I'm goin' to rap for a show down on them promises, an' see what's in 'em.'

"'The camp ain't long on Scripture, nohow,' says Dave Tutt, 'an' I'm short partic'lar. It's your game, though, an' your Amerioan jedgment goes soopreme as to how you plays it.'

"This yere Wilkins lives in a wickey-up out on the aidge of town, an' a girl, which she's his daughter, about nineteen years old, keeps camp for him. No one knows her well. She stays on her reservation mighty close, an' never seems to show much in town. I notices her in the Store once, buyin' some salt hoss, an' she ain't no dream of loveliness, neither, as to looks.

"Her face makes you feel she's a good people, though, with her big soft eyes. They has a tired, broke-down look, like somehow she's been packed more'n she can carry, an' has two or three notions about layin' down with the load.

"It's mebby two weeks after Cherokee Hall plugs the man from Red Dog one day when we're all in the Red Light takin' our forty drops. Sam Enrich brings up this subject of Wilkins.

"'It has been a question with me,' he says, 'how this old shorthorn and his girl manages for to make out, an' while I care none whatever for Wilkins, it ain't no credit to a live camp like this to permit a young female to suffer, an' I pauses here to add it ain't goin' to be so no more. Yesterday, allowing to bushwhack some truth about 'em, I waits till I sees old Wilkins start over to the corral, and then I goes projectin' round for the facts. I works it plenty cunnin', an' sorter happens up to the old man's tepee. I calls the girl out an' puts it up I wants to see her paw a heap on some business.

"'I wants to meet him speshul,' I says.

"'Well, he ain't here now,' says the girl, 'so whatever'l you do?'

"'I don't reckon you could prance round some an' find him for me, could you, Miss?' I says.

"'So the girl,' continued Enright, 'which her name is Susan, she says, puts on her shaker an' goes stampedin' off, an' while she's gone I injuns and spies round a whole lot, an' comin' down to the turn, Wilkins and that girl ain't got a blame thing to eat. The question now is, what action does Wolfville take at a juncture sech as this?'

"'What's the matter with takin' up a donation like they does for a preacher an' give it to the girl?' says Dan Boggs.

"'You couldn't open your game that away, nohow,' says Doc. Peets. 'That's all accordin' to Hoyle for sky pilots and missionary people, but a young female a holdin' of herse'f high would refuse your money. Thar's nothin' ketches me like a female of my species in distress, an' I minds offerin' to stake a lady who's lost her money somehow back in St. Louis once. This yere female was strange to me entire, but if she had knowed me from way back she couldn't a blazed up more

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frightful. The minute I pulls my money on her she goes cavortin' off too hostile to talk. It takes me ten minutes to get her back to the agency to apologise, an' even then she glares an' snorts like she's liable to stampede again. No, you don't want to try an' give this girl no money. What we needs is to hunt up something for her to work at an' pay her for it.'

"'The Doc.'s right,' says Enright; 'an' the thing is to find something for this yere lady to do. Any member with a notion on the subject can't speak too quick.'

"'No gent need take my remarks as personal,' says Burns, who runs the Red Light, 'as nothin' invidious is intended, but I rises to say that a heap of my business is on credit. A man comes in free an' sociable, names his sozodont, an' gets it. If he pays cash, all right.

"'"You names your day to drink, an' you names your day to pay," is my motto, as you all knows. This bein' true, under present exigencies what for a scheme would it be for me to get an outfit of books, day books, week books, ledgers, an' the rest of the lay-out, an' let this yere girl keep 'em a whole lot? I throws out this as a suggestion.'

"'I ain't a-meanin' nothin' against Burns' suggestion,' says Texas Thompson, 'but in my opinion this camp ain't ripe for keepin' books as yet. Things like that havin' to be lived up to by degrees. I've knowed a heap of trouble come from keepin' books, an' as long as we've a peaceful camp let's keep it that away.'

"'That settles it,' says Burns; 'thar's enough said, an' I don't keep no books.'

"'You alls present knows me,' says Cherokee Hall, who turns faro in the Red Light, 'an' most of you has met me frequent in a business way. Thar's my game goin' every night reg'lar. Thar's nothin' tin horn about it. It ain't no skin game neither. Any gent with doubts can step across the street an' test my box, which he'll find sittin' all comfortable on the layout a waitin' his convenience. It ain't been usual for me to blow my own bazoo to any extent, an' I only does it now as being preliminary to the statement that my game ain't no dead fall, an' is one as a respectable an' virchus female could set in on with perfect safetiood to her reputation. This yere lady in question needs light, reg'lar employment, an' I lets it fly that if she wants in on any sech deal I'll pay her fifty dollars a week to hold down the chair as lookout for my game.'

"'Cherokee's offer is all right,' says Enright; 'it's good talk from a square man. Women, however, is partic'lar, an', like horses, they shies at a heap of things thar ain't no danger in. You sees, a woman doesn't reason nothing. She jest feels, an' mighty likely this young person is loaded to the guard with notions against gamblin' an' sech as would send her flyin' at the bare mention. The fact is, I thinks of somethin' similar, but has to give it up. I figgers, first dash out of the box, that a safe, easy trail to high ground is to give her a table an' let her deal a little "stud" for the boys. This yere wouldn't be no risk, an' is a shore thing for nine or ten dollars a night. Beiu' a benevolence, I know the boys would set in mighty free, an' the trouble would be corralled right thar. With this yere in my mind I tips her gently about our various game when I calls for her paw; an', to tell the truth, she takes it reluctant an' disgusted at the mere idee. Of course, we has to stand these things from women, so we might as well p'int up some other way. an' no time lost.'

"'Don't you all reckon for to make a special rake on all poker goin' same as about that Yaller House man might be an ondefeasible way to get at the neck of this business?' says Dave Tutt. 'I merely asks it as a question.'

"'That wouldn't do,' says Doc. Peets. 'But, anyhow, here comes Wilkins now, an' if, as Enright says, they're out of chuck up his way something ought to be done at once, an' I guess I'll jest lose a small bet to the old shorthorn until such time as we devises some scheme all reg'lar.'

"'Hello, Wilkins!' says Doc., mighty gay an' genial, 'how's things stackin' up?'

"'Mighty ornary,' says Wilkins.

"'Feel like makin' a bet?' says Doc.

"'What do you all want to bet at?' says Wilkins.

"'Oh,' says Doc. Peets, 'I'm feelin' a heap careless about what I do bet at. S'pose I goes you ten dollars' worth of grub the Lordsburg buckboard don't show up none to-day?'

"'If I had ten dollars I'd about call you a lot on that,' says Wilkins, 'but I'm a poor cuss, an' ain't got no Red Light whisky chips you ain't usin', be you? S'pose you all look in your bags and sees. I'm needin' of a drink mighty bad.'

"The man looks some queer about the eyes, an' more'n usual shaky, so we gives him a big drink, an' he sorter braces up.

"'I'll back Wilkins' end of that bet you offers, Doc.,' says Tutt, 'so consider it made, will you?'

"'You are offerin' to bet grub,' says the old man, powerful peevish and fretful, 'what for do you want to bet grub? Why don't you bet money, so I gets what I wants with it? It's my money when I wins. Mebby I don't want no grub. Mebby I wants clothes, tobacco, or whisky. You ain't no sport, Doc., to go for to tie up a bet with a string like that. Gimme another drink, someone. I'm most dyin' for some.'

"The old man 'pears like he's mighty sick that away, so thar's nothin' for it but to give him another hooker, which we does accordin'.

"'I'm feelin' like I was shot hard by something,' he says, 'an' I don't like for to go home till I'm better, an' scare Sue. I reckon I'll sorter camp down on this monte table for an hour till I comes round.' So Wilkins curls up on the table, an' no one notices him for twenty minutes, when along comes rattlin' up the Lordsburg mail.

"'You wins the bet, Wilkins,' says Peets. 'Come over to the store, and cut out your stuff.'

"The old man acts like he don't hear, so Doc. shakes him up some. No use; thar ain't no get up in him.

"'Looks like he's gone to sleep for good,' says Doc.

"Then he walks round him, shakes him, an' takes a look at his eye, a-openin' it with his finger. Finally he stands back, sticks his thumbs in his belt, an' whistles surprised like.

"'What's up?' says Cherokee Hall. 'He ain't tryin' to work us for another drink, I hopes?'

"'Well, this is a deal,' says Doc. 'Ain't no humbug neither. Gents, I'm blessed if this yere old prairie dog ain't shorely up an' died.'

"We all comes up an' takes a look at him, an' Doc. had called the turn. Shore enough, there the old man lay, too dead to skin.

"'This is a hoss on us, an' no doubt about it,' says Enright. 'I ain't worryin' for Wilkins, as he most likely is ahead on the deal, but what gets me is how to break the news to this yere maiden. It's goin' to be a mighty hair-play. I reckons, Doc., you an' me better see to it ourselves.'

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"So they goes over to Wilkins' wickey-up an' calls the young girl out, an' Enright begins tellin' her mighty soft an' good as how her paw is took bad down to the Red Light, but the girl seems to get it as right as if she sets picket for it a month.

"'He's dead,' she says, an' then she cripples all down alongside of the door an' begins to sob.

"'Thar ain't no use denyin' it, Miss,' says Enright, 'your paw struck in on the big trail, where the hoof prints all p'int one way. But don't take it too hard, Miss, thar ain't a man of us don't give you sympathy. What you do now is to stay right yere, an' the camp'll tend to the funeral an' get it up right an' jest as you say, you bein' mourner-in-chief. You can trust us for the proper plung; since we buries Jack King, obsequies is our long suit.'

"The little woman struggles through somehow, an' has her nerve with her. The funeral you bet is right. We ropes in a preacher, this time belongin' to some deep-water outfit over in Tucson. He somehow gets strayed, an' happens along our way square on the call, an' he jumps in an' gives them ceremonies a scientific whirl as ain't possible nohow to amateurs. All 'round we couldn't put on more dog if we'd been plantin' Enright; all, of course, on the little girl's account. Next day the outfit goes over to see her, to find out whatever she allows to do.

"'You see, Miss,' says Enright, 'anything you say goes. Not waitin' to learn its name even, I'm directed to say as how the camp backs your play an' makes everything good.'

"'I'm allowin' to go to the States,' says the girl, 'an' I'm obliged to you.'

"'We was hopin',' says Enright, 'as how you'd stay here. We sorter figgers you'd teach us a school or somethin'. Of course, thar ain't no papooses here yet, but as a forced play we arranges to borrow a small herd from Tombstone, an' can do it, too, easy. Then agin, a night school would catch us right; say one night a week. Thar's a heap of ignorant men in this yere camp as needs a night school bad. It would pan for fifty dollars a week, Miss, an' you thinks of it.'

"No, the poor girl couldn't think of it, nohow.

"'Of course, Miss,' says Enright, 'we ain't expectin' you to open this yere academy the first card off the deck. You nacheral needs time to line up your affairs, an' am likewise wrung with grief. You takes your leisure as to that. Meanwhile, of course, your pay goes on from now.'

"But the girl couldn't listen. Her paw had died, an' now she was due in the States. She says things is all right thar. She has friends as her paw never likes, but who's friends of her all the same. She'll go to them.

"'Well, Miss,' says Enright, mighty regretful, 'if that's how it lays I reckons you'll go, so thar's nothing for us to do but settle up an' pay you some dust we owes your paw. He bein' gone, of course, you represents.'

"The girl couldn't see how anyone owes her paw 'cause he's been too sick to work,' she says.

"'We owes him, all the same,' says Enright, mighty brief and ferocious. 'We understands well enough how we comes to owe him, don't we, Doc.?'

"'You bet your life we do,' says Doc., plenty prompt an' cheerful. 'We owes it for his nailin' them hoss thiefs when they trys to clean out the corral.'

"'That's it,' says Enright, 'for ketchin' of some rustlers as lays for our stock. It's all right, Miss, you needn't look so doubtful, you wouldn't if you knows this camp. It's the last outfit on earth as would go an' give money to people. It's a good straight camp, Wolfville is, but business is business, an' it ain't givin' nothin' away, be we, Doc.?'

"'Not much,' says Doc. 'It's enough for people to pay their debts, without stampedin' round givin' things away.'

"'That's whatever,' says Enright. 'So, Miss, me an' Doc.'ll vamos over to the Red Light an' get the dust, an' I reckons we'll be back in an hour. I s'pose we owes Mr. Wilkins about 500 dollars, don't we, Doc.?'

"'Tain't so much,' says Doc., mighty guileful, as he sees the girl archin' for another buck, so he pulls out a paper an' makes a bluff. 'Here it is—493.74 dollars. I puts it down all ackerate 'cause I don't allow no one to come round an' beat me none.'

"We all comes 'round an' makes up the pot to come up to Doc.'s figgers (which I wants to say right here Doc. Peets is the best edicated man I ever sees), an' the girl has to take it.

"Of course, this money lets her out right, an' she cries an' thanks us, an' the next day she takes the stage for Tucson. We're all thar to say good-bye an' wish the little girl luck.

"'*Adios*,' says Peets, takin' off his hat to her; 'it ain't down on the bills, but if you could manage to kiss this yare outfit once apiece, Miss, it would be regarded. You needn't be afraid, none. Some of 'em looks a little off, but they're all right, an' b'ar huggin' is barred.'

"So the little girl begins with Enright an' kisses us all, a-sobbin' meantime some free. As the affection proceeds Cherokee hangs back an' allows he'll pass.

"'Not any pass,' says Enright. 'Any man who throws off on kissin' that thar girl, she willin', needn't look for any luck but lynchin'.'

"'That settles it,' says Cherokee, 'I kissen this yere lady.'

"So he ups an' kisses the girl sorter hasty, like she's a hot flat-iron, an' backs into the crowd.

"'Cherokee makes me weary,' says Peets, who's ridin' herd on the play. When it comes his turn he kisses her slow an' rapturus, an' then looks contemptuous at Cherokee.

"When she's in the stage a-startin' Cherokee walks up all respectful.

"'You've been away from the States some time, Miss,' he says, 'an it's some possible you won't find things the way you expects. Now, you remember, shore, whatever game's bein' turned back there, if it goes ag'in you raise the long yell for a sharp called Cherokee Hall, an' his bank's yours to go behind your play.'"

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A Trial in Fiction

There is a time in the life of nearly every educated person when he feels that fierce, unconquerable desire to write—to put into words for the benefit of coming generations such thoughts and fancies as may occur to him or to her.

And, indeed, I believe one may wish to write without even possessing the thoughts to embody in one's effusions, so great is the fascination of seeing one's own writings in print.

To this curious malady I became an early victim. And the acceptance of an occasional poem by various weekly papers added fresh fuel to the unquenchable fire of literary ambition. At twenty-two I occupied a minor editorial position on a daily paper, and had had one or two stories accepted by one of the great magazines. Consequently, I began to feel rather important in a literary way, and this tendency was decidedly encouraged by compliments, sincere and otherwise, of those with whom I came in contact.

One of these, and one who from its beginning had taken a warm interest in my literary work, was a girl—Miss Katherine Merry. I had known Miss Merry almost from childhood and had always had considerable admiration for her. I looked upon her as entirely different from the other girls of my acquaintance. She was rather intellectual in her tastes, very fond of reading, and had even published some very creditable verses, although she was my junior by two years. She was not a girl to flirt with, and she absolutely disliked compliments. That is, she really did dislike them, differing in this respect from the majority of women, who may affect to despise flattery, but who are none the less susceptible to its influence. She and I were hail-fellow-well-met together to a more or less degree. We understood each other very well, were interested in each other's projects, and enjoyed comparing notes over our failures and successes.

One night, when it so happened that we were both dining at the same house, the conversation turned upon that much-mooted question as to whether such a thing as a platonic love were possible. Miss Merry and myself both argued warmly for the affirmative, and probably we each thought of our mutual friendship as an instance, although upon that point we kept silent, contenting ourselves with mentioning historic cases.

The other side, however, probably because those who constituted it were better informed and more able to express their ideas, had somewhat the best of the argument, and Miss Merry and I, although still unconvinced, were compelled to withdraw from the battle.

I walked home with the Merrys afterwards, and while her father and mother went ahead, Miss Merry and I strolled slowly after them, discussing the subject which had been under consideration at dinner.

"Why, of course it is possible," she said. "There are you and I."

"To be sure," I answered, "we are living flesh and blood evidence. By-the-way, I have a scheme. Why shouldn't we write a story together about a platonic friendship? I think we could work it up in great form."

"That's a capital idea," exclaimed Miss Merry. "You could furnish the man's ideas and I the woman's."

"Good! Already I behold the comfortable cheque for our labour."

"Oh, that is too bad. You are always putting a cash value on things. Remember, sir, that this is a story that is to show the world how plantonic friendships may and do exist."

"All right. When shall we commence work? You know we must talk our plot over first. To-morrow is my day off from the paper. Shall I call in the afternoon?"

"Yes, do, and we can take a walk and arrange the plot."

Thus it was arranged that we should collaborate in a story, and the following day, according to the engagement, I called at the Merry household.

Miss Merry came down ready for the walk, with her hat and gloves on. That was one of her characteristics—she never kept one waiting. It is little things like this that make you form a platonic friendship for a girl, if anything will.

"I've been thinking of a title for our story," she cried. "What shall we call it?"

"You must name it," I said, "that is part of your share of the labour."

"Very well, then, let us call it 'Two Friends.'"

"That's a capital idea. Now for the plot."

The plot was a hard thing to settle. The story must have some element to lend colour to it. Love of course, was barred out, and friendship must take its place; but how, and what incidents to make use of in order to portray it happily, was an extremely knotty and difficult question. One thing we fixed upon. There must be a noble sacrifice on the part of one or both of our characters. But of what nature and circumstances it should be we could not determine.

"Do you think," I inquired tentatively, "that such a friendship could rise superior even to love?"

"I don't know," hesitated Miss Merry.

"You see, I can't speak from experience, and novelists always set love on a pedestal above the other emotions."

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"True! But this other story of ours must not be formed on the theories of other writers. We must originate it entirely."

"I don't see how. Neither of us is in love or has ever been to my knowledge."

"Nor to mine," I returned hastily, perhaps because on this point a shadow of a doubt had crept over me.

But on due reflection I determined that I had answered with perfect frankness. No, I was not in love with Elsie Harwood by any means. I admired her very much, it was true, and I fancied that she rather liked me. I had seen a good deal of her during the past summer, and once or twice the idea had entered my head that she was much nicer than most girls, and that I liked to be with her. That was all. Why, I had not seen her a dozen times since she returned to the town.

Having thus disposed of the trifling doubt which assailed my conscience, I turned to Katherine, who had been busy planning meanwhile.

"There is only one way to do it," she cried.

"And that?"

"One of us must fall in love."

I confess that the idea staggered me at first, and it was with difficulty that I recovered breath enough to ask:

"Which of us?"

"Well," said Katherine thoughtfully, "I think you had better. The consequences are so much less apt to be dangerous for a man."

"Here, I don't know about that. Suppose I were really to fall in love and get married?"

"Just so. What of it? You must get married some time."

"But marriage is a thing a fellow doesn't want to jump into out of hand, in the manner you suggest."

"You goose! You need not fall head over heels in love; a mild case of imaginary love will answer the purpose."

"Suppose it should cause our friendship to break up?"

"Oh, consistency, thou art a jewel. Then how about our theory of platonic affection?" said Katherine, with a twinkle in her blue eyes.

"True enough," I replied. "I'll try it. I'll fall in love with Miss Harwood immediately."

"Oh, no, not with her, surely. She is so insipid and foolish."

Now I did not think Miss Harwood insipid or foolish at all, and Katherine's criticism nettled me somewhat, so that I answered rather stiffly that I supposed a fellow might choose for himself whom he was to fall in love with.

"Certainly," said Katherine, "you are free to fall in love with a wooden Indian if you wish."

Whereupon we walked in silence for some time, while the plot of our story made very little progress.

Insipid and foolish, indeed! I tried to recall any instance of these qualities to Miss Harwood, but could not. I only remembered that she had very large eyes and a very pretty mouth with the whitest of teeth. She was a rather *petite* and clinging sort of girl. At least that was my mannish definition of a woman who drew forth the chivalric instincts of a man. I thought of the long drives we had had together during the summer and how much I had enjoyed talking to her. Although she seldom said much she seemed to grasp my ideas, looking up to me the while with her big eyes in a confiding and trustful manner. "Oh, no," I thought, "she is anything but insipid." Whereupon Katherine, who must have guessed my thoughts, said:

"When you have finished thinking about Elsie, perhaps you will condescend to return to our story."

"Of course, my dear Katherine, you must really pardon the absent-mindedness of one who is so deeply in love."

We both laughed at this, and the laugh made things a little better between us. We agreed that our plot must form itself naturally, and the chief incident must be the falling in love of the hero with another girl. As for the sacrifice we had determined must play an important part in the story, we could not very well determine what it should be.

Miss Merry suggested that the hero should give up his sweetheart so as to prolong his friendship with his platonic friend. I reminded her that she had just expressed the sentiment that love or marriage would not interfere with such a friendship.

"But then his wife would probably be jealous," said Katherine. "The chances are ten to one that she would be an ignorant, empty-headed little fool."

This reply of Katherine's angered me, I scarcely knew why. I felt in her description of our hero's imaginary lover she had a certain person in her mind, and that person Miss Harwood. It was the first time I had ever known Katherine to be spiteful or anything else resembling it, and it annoyed me particularly, as I knew that Miss Harwood was not at all foolish, although she was not what one would call an intellectual girl.

We walked in silence for some time, and finally I gave utterance to the opinion that I did not think a man would give up his lover under the circumstances.

"If there is such a thing as a friendship such as we have in mind it must survive all barriers. It must be far above any such petty considerations as jealousy."

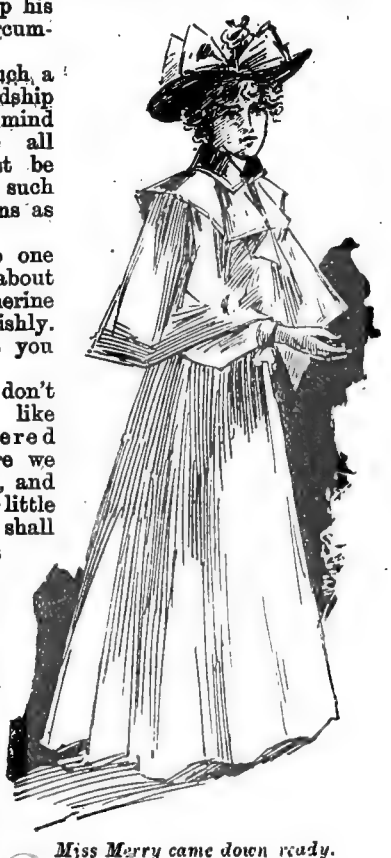
"I am sure no one said anything about jealousy," Katherine said rather pettishly. "I'm afraid that you flatter yourself."

"Oh, no! I don't mean anything like that," I answered hastily; "but here we are at your door, and we have made very little progress. When shall we have our next *séance?*"

"Can you come to-morrow evening?"

"Yes, and we will begin the story then."

But the next evening came, and the story was not begun. I called, and found Williams, a man I



Miss Merry came down ready.

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never cared very much for, talking away gaily to Katherine.

Williams was determined to stay as long as I, and as our story was, of course, not mentioned, I had to leave without making another engagement.

I went away in rather an angry mood, disgusted with Williams, who had always seemed to me too familiar with Katherine, annoyed because I fancied that Katherine herself had treated me somewhat coldly.

Williams had called on Katherine pretty frequently of late. Suppose she were to marry him. Why not? I disliked him personally, but I found upon sober reflection that I knew of absolutely nothing against the man. Other people liked him, men as well as women. He was of good family, well off, and, I remembered with distinct dissatisfaction, he was remarkably good-looking.

There was no reason in the world why Katherine should not marry him if she chose, even though I did not like him. At all events I thought I would speak to her about him, and see what she thought of him.

I never doubted but she would tell me her sentiments in regard to him, so great had our confidence in each other been ever since childhood.

I called on Miss Harwood the next day. She received me very graciously, and I spent a very delightful half hour with her.

Unconsciously, however, I began to compare her with Katherine's description of "an empty-headed little fool." Certainly she was very pretty, and her manner and everything she said were very charming. Her words were few, but carefully chosen, and that which they expressed were simple and to the point. But I went away with a new idea born into my brain, which grew hour by hour until I arrived at the conclusion that I did not, nor could I ever, love Elsie Harwood as a man should love his wife.

Side by side with this thought a companion idea evolved itself unconsciously. Indistinct and insignificant at first, it gradually assumed a magnitude and importance until it mastered my whole being, and then I knew that I could love but one woman—she who shared with me our so-called plantonic friendship and my literary collaborator.

In the meantime our story had made no progress at all. I had only seen Katherine in various public places, and she was always with some one—frequently Williams. They seemed very friendly towards each other. Indeed, I thought at times that I could detect love glances exchanged between them. I sighed to myself as I thought of the old days of our friendship and the happy confidence we had reposed in each other. "Alas," I thought, "it is all over, and our poor little story will never be written, I fear."

At last one day I called and found her alone. Neither of us spoke of the story at first, but different things entirely foreign to it. Finally I asked her about Williams—whether she cared for him or not.

"I do not see why you should ask me that question."

I must have asked the question in an unpleasant manner, for I could see that she was hurt. For several minutes she made me no answer.

"I do not see why you should ask me that question," she said slowly, with her eyes fixed upon the floor.

"I have a perfect right," I answered. "I want to know whether or not our friendship is to come to an end."

"It need never come to an end, under any circumstances."

"I do not believe it," I cried. "Katherine, if you marry that man, we can never be friends again. Tell me, do you care for him?"

Katherine laughed, and as I hate to be laughed at I grew angry.

"What about our theory that we are going to express in our story?" she asked.

"Oh, hang the story! This is real life, and I am in earnest. Do you love Dick Williams?"

"I like him very much."

"Would you marry him, then?"

"I call that question rather impertinent. Do you love Elsie Harwood? And will she marry you?"

Katherine laughed again, and my anger vanished. I suddenly realised that she had been making game of me.

"Katherine," I said, "you know whom I love. There is only one way that we can ever finish our story. Shall we collaborate for good?"

And she said "Yes." And we did. And one sunshiny spring day we wrote out this little story together, which is to prove that platonic friendship does not exist. And when we had nearly arrived at the end Katherine said: "How shall we finish it?" And I said "Like this," brushing back as I spoke the brown hair from her forehead to kiss it.

Esther Noanes.

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HOW I SAVED HIM.

I SHALL never forget that night.

The moon threw a pale, sickly light through the branches of the big trees that formed the forest of which we, in that out-of-the-way Virginian town, were so proud—that same moon by the light of which many a young couple were probably making love in all parts of the American continent.

It was no lovesick swain and sighing maid that the moon revealed to me. There upon the bit of turf where we had often enjoyed an impromptu picnic under the shadow of the trees on summer afternoons lay the body of a man who, but a few hours before, had held me in his arms in the garden at the back of father's house, and sworn to make me his wife, and called me "Sweetheart mine." Then he had said "Good-night," and started to walk across a corner of the forest to a farmhouse where he had recently taken up his abode as a summer visitor.

Who was he? I did not know. Yes, it may seem strange, but I was a young country girl ill-versed in the etiquette of introductions, or in the wickedness of mankind. All I knew was that he was just such a big, bronzed, bearded man as I had read of in books—not one of the uncouth Virginian farmers who formed the only male society that I had ever enjoyed. His beard was beautifully trimmed; he had a slight pointed moustache and curly hair, and he was dressed like one of the smart gentlemen I had seen in illustrations. I could not have dared ask him any inquisitive questions as to who he was, why he had to come to our little town, or why he seemed to know no one there, or to have any definite object in his visit.

I had met him casually one evening in the forest, when, after the heat of the day, I had let down my hair and scampered down the turf drive to enjoy the cool breeze and the stillness of the forest on the very spot where I now stood looking at him. On that evening as I stood still to take breath, and to wonder how girls in big cities could live without a forest, that man had stepped out from among the trees and asked me who I was, and where I got my pink cheeks and my beautiful locks. My cheeks had changed from pink to red, and he and I had sauntered back through the forest together until the sun had disappeared and the cold night air had warned me that I must be going home to father. And the man had kissed me. That was all the introduction we had, and I knew no other better form of introduction.

And now he lay there on the turf, looking so ghastly by moonlight, when I thought he had gone home long since, and I had only sought the spot for its association's sake—to recall the happy hour I had spent with him there on the first evening of our acquaintance.

Was he dead? Yes, it must be so. He looked so stiff and he hardly moved a muscle since the bullet had pierced his heart right before my eyes. I could not raise an alarm. Indeed, as I stood there I hardly noticed that the man who, unconscious of my presence, had fired the fatal shot, was nowhere to be seen.

I did not shriek. No. I only felt very, very cold, and my hands clasped one another so tightly that I felt as if they would never come apart. I had never seen death before, but I realised that I saw it now. Then I fell on my knees and crawled up to the man, and knelt over him and listened. But he did not breathe. Then I saw that his clothes were wet—oh, so wet—on one side, and blood was still trickling through the check tweed cloth which I had so admired at our first meeting.

I did not know the dead man's name; so could not call to him. It was all so wondrous strange that I did not seem even sorry—only overcome by the sight of a dead man by moonlight, a man who was to have been my husband, as I thought. But what was husband? What was lover? I know now; but I did not know then. To me he had only been a new kind of man, quite different to any I had known before. And, instead of treating me as an uncouth child, he had talked to me and made a companion of me—and kissed me.

And as I knelt and gazed at the stiff white face, so hard-looking now, with teeth firmly set, I saw in front of me a few yards on the other side of the body, a shadow suddenly cast on the ground, and a hand was gently placed on my shoulder.

Even then I was not frightened. I turned round and found the figure of a man bending over me. I sprang to my feet, and seizing him by the arms, turned him round so as to throw the light full on his face. A mere boy—at least I thought so, because he had no beard.

"Is he dead?" he asked.

"Quite dead."

"It is well."

"Well!" I almost shrieked. "What do you mean? Is it well that a man should be killed?"

"It is well," he repeated. "He was doomed——"

"To be murdered?" asked I.

"To be shot like a cur," said he.

"Who are you to dare speak of him like that?" I demanded as drops of perspiration came out upon my forehead.

"And may I ask what brought you to this spot at this time of night?"

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"To find the body of a murdered man, but not to be cross-questioned by his murderer," was the reply. And then, as I saw the young fellow's handsome face looking so hurt at what I had said, I took one of his hands in both mine, and added: "I did not mean it. You do not look like a murderer. You look so kind and young and good. Tell me, what does this all mean?"

"You are right at first," he said; "I am a murderer. I shot that man partly for your sake, and partly for my own satisfaction. He deserved it."

"Oh, do not say that," I pleaded. "What do you know of him or me? Who are you?"

"I know too much of him. I followed him to this neighbourhood. He fled here from New York to escape his fate; but I was not to be deprived of all I have lived for since I left England three months ago. Two years ago he married my sister in London and brought her over to New York, where, by continual ill-treatment and depriving her of the bare necessaries of life at a critical time, he killed her by inches. Happily, a friend of hers cabled me to come from London, and I arrived just in time to see the last of my poor sister.

"'Algie,' she said, 'do not put yourself out about me, but make it the object of your life to see that no other girl ever falls into his clutches. I fear I am not his first victim!'

"Well, hardly was his girl-wife—she was only twenty when she died—laid in her grave than this brute here got engaged to the daughter of a man who owns a big shop in New York. I met him one night coming out of her father's house, and as he came out I went in and told father and daughter the story of my sister's married life. Three days later he was being anxiously inquired after by a big man—the father of a pretty girl who had mysteriously disappeared from St. Joseph, Missouri—who made no secret of a six-shooter that he carried in his pocket. New York saw the blackguard no more; but I did not lose touch with him. By a queer coincidence I was at the railway station when he drove up and hurriedly asked for a ticket to your town over there. Two days afterwards I was after him, and I overheard what passed between you and him in your father's garden this evening. I feared it might be useless to interfere between you two in the ordinary way, so, to fulfil my promise to my dead sister, I appealed to my friend here," and he callously drew a revolver from his pocket.

"See," he said, "it only required one barrel, but I had five more ready if needed."

"But you must not stay here," I said, with a shudder at the thought of being the only witness against the man who had done this dreadful deed for my sake. "You must go at once. A train passes through B—— at two o'clock in the morning; you have over two hours drive, and you can get a conveyance at Simeon Martin's, and I will show you the way."

"No!" he said firmly, "that will not do. I will give myself up."

"Oh, don't—don't do that!" I cried. "Anything rather than that. Here, I will help you carry the body away to a spot where it may not be found for years. Come, see," and I half raised the corpse, "we can easily manage it between us."

"I must give myself up, and trust to a jury not convicting me," he replied.

"You shall not! No. I will not let you. You must go now, quick!" and I threw my arms round his neck, and looked up into his bonnie face, and implored and coaxed. But he only smiled such a brave smile upon me, and patted my shoulder and stroked my hair as I clung to him. "I must give myself up," he repeated, "and you must bear witness against me."

"That I will never do. I will lie. I will run away myself. I will kill myself. Ah, good! I know. I will say I murdered that man—that you took the revolver from me, and swore you would confess to the murder to save me. They know me here, and will believe me rather than believe a stranger."

"It cannot—shall not—be. I can prove that I have been hunting the wretch down, and have sworn to do for him. It's no good, little woman. You must give in, and you must not mind if they do hang me. I don't, very much. I've no one to care for now that my sister is gone."

"Yes, you have; you must care for me."

I knew not what I was saying, or perhaps not the full purport. I only knew that he must be saved. Oh, how handsome and defiant he looked. And I took his arm and said:

"Come, you must go, and I must send the men out to fetch the body. Father won't think it strange that I should be out here at night. I often come out for a long walk before going to bed You see I am but a wild country girl." And he bent forward and gave me a kiss on the forehead, such a different one to what he—that dead man—had given me.

"Where does the mayor live?" he asked. "I will go straight there."

Suddenly, as by an inspiration, the mention of the mayor reminded me of a farmer who, a few years back, had given himself up for killing a farm-hand: the man had attacked him in a fit of drunken frenzy. The only witness to the deed was the farmer's wife, and the mayor told the farmer that the evidence of a wife would not be taken against the husband. And the accused was still at liberty.

We had nearly reached the edge of the forest. I turned to my companion and said: "I can save you. You must give yourself up, but not to-day."

His face brightened only for a moment. "You do not know what you say, child. It is impossible."

"Listen!" said I. "Will you grant me one favour? Do not think badly of me. You will think I am mad, but I am not. Will you be my husband? Will you drive me away with you now to Q——? If we drive slowly we shall not reach there till to-morrow morning. We will go straight to the mayor and get married. Then we can drive back. You can give yourself up and I will offer evidence against you. They cannot take a wife's evidence against her husband."

And who shall say that the marriage laws of America are too lax since our happy-go-lucky mode of tying the marriage knot enabled me to save the deliverer!

After the strange man was discharged from custody I told him he must go away and never see me again; I told him I had married him that he might enjoy freedom—not bondage.

But still he was firm. "No!" he said, "I will not go. I will give myself up—to you, my darling, to make your life a happy one." And he has done so. L. P. N.

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An Experiment in Psychology.

"What do you think of it, Tom?"

"Hanged if I know, old man; seems to me very like a hoax. What's your opinion?"

"No," said my chum, meditatively balancing the poker with which he had been stirring the fire. "I don't think it's that. You see these psychical research fellows are too jolly well in earnest to joke over the thing, and if an outsider meant to hoax anyone he'd practise on a believer, and not on a downright sceptic. Besides the address is all right," turning to a directory we had been consulting, "Dr. C. E. Manners, Ulverstone House, Brixton. Well, what are you going to do about it? To go or not to go, that is the question."

That *was* the question. A few days previously I had entered into a newspaper controversy on the subject of Pre-existence. It had always seemed to me a wild theory, and I had written a letter ridiculing the thing far more, perhaps, than the occasion warranted.

The immediate result was the following note:

Dear Sir,—I have read your letter in the *Gazette* of the 24th. I am aware I am taking a great liberty in asking you to call on me, but truth is desirable under any circumstances, and I can convince you that, far from being a mad dream, pre-existence is a reality. There seems something familiar to me in the style of your letter, but whether we have met before in another age or not I cannot tell—yet. But will you come and see me?—Yours,

C. E. Manners.

"You see, Bob," I said, continuing the conversation this invitation had caused, "it's such a curious affair. Why couldn't he come here? 'Met before in another age' sounds a bit like madness, eh? He's pretty sure of himself, too. He doesn't say he will discuss the matter—he's going to convince me."

"It'll take him a long time, if he only knew it," Bob jerked out, lighting his pipe, and speaking between the puffs. "Well, the only consideration is—is the game worth the candle? Of course, if you're not interested in the affair, don't go. There certainly doesn't seem to be much fun in it, but if he met you in a former age, you'll gain some useful knowledge of your own antecedents. I don't think *I* should care to rake up my last incarnation but one," he proceeded laughingly. "I might have too much on my conscience after it was all over. For all I know I might have been Nero, or Richard the Third, or Dick Turpin, and would perhaps recognise in the confounded tailor of mine one of my former victims, avenging his fifteenth century wrongs in the nineteenth century manner. But, of course, you're all right; you're a lawyer, and such matters wouldn't worry you."

"I think I'll go, if I've nothing else to do one evening. Here, let's toss for it. Heads I go."

"It's head," cried Bob, as I uncovered the coin.

Three evenings later, finding time very hard to kill (Bob had gone to the theatre with some of his friends, and I had no inclination for reading law), I decided to walk down to Brixton and try to find Ulverstone House.

I easily discovered the place, and it differed in no respect from the other detached villas, which formed the quiet road in which it stood. Three-storeyed, double-fronted, with a fairly large garden before it, it looked eminently respectable and orthodox.

I rang the bell, and a neat servant girl showed me into the doctor's study. While I waited I looked curiously round the room. There was nothing professional about it, and I certainly found no reason for believing the owner to be a man of remarkable character or eccentric ways and ideas. A table, filled with books and papers, stood in one corner, and, prominent among its contents, I noticed a recent treatise on re-incarnation, and a copy of the *Gazette*.

A large bookcase filled nearly the whole of one side of the room, and, from the further end, stretching across to the opposite wall, hung a heavy curtain, thus dividing the apartment. Before the door and windows hung other curtains. A few ornaments were on the mantelpiece, a few engravings on the walls, a luxurious armchair stood near the fire, and a cluster of incandescent lamps threw a brilliant light over the room.

I had scarcely time to notice my surroundings before the door opened again, and a gentleman entered and came towards me.

"'Mr. Scott, I am very pleased to see you," he said, "and must ask you to pardon me if my letter seemed strange. Won't you sit down? I think you will find this armchair more comfortable," crossing the room as he spoke and moving the chair slightly from the fire.

I sat down in silence, for there was something about him that effectually prevented me from using the commonplaces that spring to one's tongue on an intro-

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duction. Courtesy demands in most cases the polite expressions that mean so little and sound so graceful, but here it was different. It was no venerable form and face that made such phrases seem out of place. The doctor was of medium stature, well built, well dressed. His hair was grey—almost white. His face was clean shaven; by no means handsome, but the expression——!

It was that that checked the words on my lips. It seemed to me that knowledge was written in the eyes, on the lips, and in every line of his face. Not that which comes from books and study, but the knowledge which belongs to genius—which knows all things in their naked truth, and surveys them from a standpoint far removed from that of ordinary men. He himself had used conventional phrases, yet to me it seemed only a concession to the usages of that society of which I was a member, and to which as his guest I was entitled. I thought of the Sphinx of Egypt, and of an author I had once read who called its features the ideal of serene power and omniscience. But here was the *living* face speaking of power and knowledge in every movement. It was a revelation, and I felt awed before it.

The doctor first broke the silence. At the sound of his voice I tried to shake off the impression he had made, conscious that I should need all my self-possession if I wished to hold my own against him in argument.

"Your letter in the *Gazette* was very severe, Mr. Scott," he said smiling, "but it was not particularly its severity, or the fact that you are such a thorough sceptic, that induced me to ask you to come here. I have never entered into discussions myself, although I think I read nearly all. It was your method of reasoning that interested me."

A gentleman entered and came towards me.

"Indeed," I replied, "I'm afraid there was little brilliancy or originality in my arguments. I simply took a common sense view of the question, and wrote accordingly."

"Common sense! Exactly—that is the point on which we differ. It is an *un*-common sense that opens up to us the great truth of Pre-existence—all other truths, indeed—but of this it is the essential."

"You would imply that minds capable of believing the theory must be possessed of some great faculty which is denied to the ordinary thinker?" I questioned, half sarcastically.

"Exactly," he replied, leaning back in his chair, with a smile. "And you think I am unfair in having taken a position from which it is impossible to drive me, and yet on which I have (to your mind) no reasonable grounds for standing."

"I certainly think it a most unsatisfactory position," I said. "For myself, belief must be the result of reasoning. No advance in Metaphysics—or any branch of Science, can be made unless the results are deduced logically from facts."

"I agree with your last observation, most decidedly, but are you sure all men have the same facts to reason from? Every man is an unknown quantity to his fellows who cannot tell what knowledge he has. Well, I have promised to convince you and I shall do so. Does not an action, or a spoken sentence sometimes give you the impression that you have been in the same position, or spoken the same words, before?"

"It's not an uncommon occurrence," I replied. "Most people have experienced it. It is the partial remembrance of an action, revived by its association with a slight link connecting the past and the present. But it is a memory of this life; there is no need to go back farther than a few years—to childhood, at any rate—for its solution."

"No *need!* That is hardly logical."

He suddenly broke off and rose from the chair, throwing up his arms, his whole face changing from its calm, meditative expression to one of eagerness and expectancy. His eyes gleamed, every feature grew thinner and sharper. The man had changed utterly, and with that change I lost the feeling of almost reverence with which he had inspired me. In place of him whose words had nearly carried conviction with them, and who had spoken calmly and deliberately, as if with a certain knowledge, there stood the *seeker* after truth—the uncertain, conjecturing man, knowing himself in the darkness and hoping for the light.

But his emotion died away, and leaning one arm on the mantelpiece, and resting his head on his hand, he said suddenly: "You have no recollection of Aristotle?"

"Of Aristotle? Oh, yes, I am fairly intimate with his works," I replied, wondering at the question put in such a negative form.

"I am speaking of the man. The works he left are but ghosts of his lectures. Ah! you recollect nothing," he said, slowly shaking his head, "and yet you were with him, too. But you *shall* remember." And again his manner changed to eager nervousness, and he walked across the room and dragged back the heavy curtain with a clatter of rings on their brass pole.

The change alarmed me; there was something strange in his behaviour, and something stranger in his voice even than in his words. Simultaneously with his movement I had risen and advanced a few steps, but as he flung aside the curtain and turned and looked me in the face I shrank back involuntarily. All the serenity had vanished from his features, his eyes were opened wildly, and there was a glare in them that put me on my guard at once. His nostrils were dilated, his lips parted, and his whole body trembled with excitement. My heart stopped beating, and then gave a bound that sent the blood rushing to my head—*the man was mad!*

Past the curtain I saw, beneath a white covering, the outline of a couch, with something rising and spreading

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on each side from the head. There was nothing more in the apartment, and I knew the object was in some way connected with the madness of the man before me. Of all horrors the indefinite is the worst, and, as I stood there—my eyes wandering from the face of the doctor to the object beyond—I felt powerless to speak or move. The suddenness of the discovery I had made numbed me, and my heart beat thickly and uncertainly.

"Come," he said, and turning from me he moved towards the couch and placed his hand on the sheet to drag it off.

But his movement had broken the spell and brought back all my power of speech and thought.

"Pray don't trouble, Dr. Manners," I said as calmly as I could, "I will call and see you again. It's getting late and I really haven't time now."

To say they sounded forced and false would give little idea of the effect both my words and voice had on me. Had the situation been less horrible I should have laughed at the incongruity of my words and feelings.

But whatever of my true state of mind my voice expressed was unnoticed by the doctor. One word alone caught his ear.

"Time!" he exclaimed, dropping the cloth, and suddenly swinging round with a contemptuous gesture. "What is time to one who has lived in the past, has seen nations rise and fall, man advance and retreat in the march of civilisation and knowledge—and who, through all, has seen the same sun rise and set—birth and death ever recurring in an eternal round—the soul passing on, never dying, through its earthly habitations, age after age? What is time to one who knows that your centuries—aye, and ages—are to eternity far less than a second is to millions of your years?"

While he was speaking I had summed up the state of affairs rather more accurately than the first alarm had allowed. I was alone with this madman, and any attempt to leave the place would most likely lead to violence on his part.

The curtains before the door and windows effectually prevented my making a dash and escaping before he could reach me. While I was drawing them aside he would be upon me—and behind me! That was not to be thought of—far better meet him face to face, if there must be a struggle; and I imagined I could hold my own if his madness did not give him greater strength than I should gain from my despair.

But before all I must try to bring him to his senses—at least to calm him. His strange language, his wish to convince me of the truth of his ideas, his abrupt gestures might mean nothing after all, and my idea of a horrible experiment, in which I should play the victim, was only conjecture. And so, endeavouring to reassure myself, I replied to him:

"Certainly it may not affect you, sir, but we unfortunate individuals, who are obliged to work amongst men who have not your deep insight into all ages, must deal with time and live in accordance with custom. I regret leaving you, but I really must do so."

"Well, first let me explain to you my discovery, and then you shall go," he said reluctantly. "I had hoped—— But there!" and he waved his hand impatiently, and withdrew the white covering. "Look!"

Drawing a few steps nearer, I surveyed the now uncovered contrivance with interest, in spite of my desire to be far away from it and its designer.

I saw a long, leather-padded, sloping table, at its higher end about three feet from the ground. At the upper end of the couch two springs rose from beneath the sides, and, curving over till within a few inches from each other, terminated in small concave brass plates. Over the centre of the head, slightly above these plates, hung a broad semi-circle of steel, supported by another spring. From either side of the table a wooden arm protruded. Round each arm covered wire was twisted, showing, as the light fell on the ends, half an inch of shining metal. Three great straps were fastened to the couch at intervals, evidently intended to buckle across the legs, waist, and arms of a person lying on it, and two steel clasps fixed midway along this hideous invention seemed placed for the purpose of effectually handcuffing the victim. Beneath the table the carpet had been cut away, and thick wires ran downwards, passing through holes in the floor.

Dragged back the heavy curtain.

I could hardly fail to recognise the fact that electricity was a prominent agent in this experiment, and though I knew nothing of its nature, I shuddered as I pictured myself bound and helpless, with the mad doctor perhaps slowly torturing my life away. But my mind had not conceived, even in its greatest fear, the horrible thing his next words suggested.

"I told you it was principally your method of argument prompted me to ask you to come here. It recalled memories of old days, and I wished your first knowledge should be of the days when you and I were together in Athens.

"Why need I explain the means by which I discovered where the secret chambers of the brain lie, in which the record of past lives is hidden? Or the reasoning which proves beyond doubt that it can be awakened now? We will pass over all that. Listen! You will lie upon this table—your head here, with these small brass plates clasping your temples. I shall then cut away part of your skull, lay bare a portion of your brain, and apply to it these electrodes. Then you will receive a series of sudden shocks——"

"Great Heavens, man!" I cried hotly, forgetting caution and everything in my indignation at such a fiendish proposal, "it's certain death. Mad as you are you cannot think me fool enough to agree to this. Let me pass!" for by this time he had come round between me and the door. "You shall keep me here no longer."

"Let you go," he repeated, "now everything is ready! Let you go—no!"

He sprang at me, taking me by surprise, and catching me round the waist, lifted me from my feet and staggered towards the table. I knew that, once stretched on it, the handcuffs would clasp my wrists, the strong belts encircle my body, and then no power on earth could save

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me. I gripped him by the throat, forcing his head back till he reeled and gasped for breath. He strove to throw me to the ground, but I only tightened my grasp—I had him with both hands now—and he struggled in vain.

Suddenly he let his hands drop, and I found myself on my feet again. Before I knew it he had drawn back his right arm and struck me in the face with his clenched fist, following it up by another blow from his left. But I was too near him for it to take full effect, and my raised arms in some measure warded it off and prevented him hitting surely. I forced him to his knees, his head hung back, and he ceased to struggle. I saw blood on his lips, and, fearing he was dying, let go my hold. But the blood came from the lip he had bitten through in his mad rage—not from his lungs—and for the rest, he was only shamming, for, the moment I released him, he caught me by the wrists and drew himself to his feet.

Then he was on me again, this time pinning my arms to my side. We fought in silence. I did not cry for help, all my energies were centred in this fight for life, and I thought of nothing but preventing the madman from dragging me to the table and throwing me upon it. He seemed made of iron, and as I grew weaker his strength increased. His arms crushed the breath from my body. I could not release mine, and was slowly pressed backward and backward till I felt the edge of the couch touch my legs. I kicked and bit like a wild beast in my despair, but gradually I was borne back—helpless upon the table.

In as few words as possible I told the whole story.

But one chance now remained. To imprison me beneath those cursed straps he must release an arm, if only for a moment. Could I at that moment make a last effort and throw him off? Oh, to get my hands again round that throat on which the marks of my fingers now showed so plainly! Then nothing but death should release him from my grasp—no crafty acting—no sudden strength should avail him. I would make sure of him then.

Presently I felt his left hand stealthily moving beneath me, while with his elbow he still pressed my arm down tightly. I knew the moment had arrived, and as he suddenly released my right arm and seized the strap, I twisted round and planted a blow full between his eyes. Then I had him by the throat again.

Down to the floor we fell, he undermost, and rolled over and over, both fighting for dear life now, for he knew he could expect no mercy.

But of a sudden I felt his hands unclasp from my wrists, and his body fall limp and lifeless. Half fearing another ruse, I threw him off me, and knelt over him, one hand on his throat still, though with relaxed grasp. With the other hand I tore away his clothing, and felt his heart. It had ceased to beat.

Breathless, sick, almost blind, I rose and staggered to the door, but it was locked (automatically I afterwards learned). I turned to the window, but before I could reach it the room spun round, blood rushed to my eyes, and hummed in my ears, and I fell.

* * * * * *

When I awoke I looked round. The door hung on one hinge, the curtain was torn down, and through the gap I saw the familiar uniform of the police. By my side sat a gentleman in evening dress, and standing a few paces away was a squarely built, bearded inspector. Whatever happened now I was safe from the torture the maniac had designed for me.

"All right now, sir?" queried the burly official, speaking to the man by my side, and nodding at me.

"Yes, I think so. How do you feel, sir? Rather light-headed? Ah, yes, but you'll soon be as right as possible. There's nothing radically wrong. A black eye, and a few scratches and bruises; that's all. Still, you'd better let him get away as soon as possible, inspector."

"Right you are, doctor. Now, sir, can you explain the meaning of this?" and he jerked his head in the direction of the curtained apartment, where the table and the dead body were still visible.

In as few words as possible I told the whole story, and when I had finished the inspector said:

"You've had a narrow escape, sir. Luckily the servant got alarmed at the noise and fetched us, although it would have been as well if she'd called us sooner. Dr. Manners was well known round here as the 'mad doctor,' but we've never had any trouble with him before. Well, you'll be wanted at the inquest, of course, but I don't think I need detain you now. I'll take your name and address though, and one of my men will see you home in a cab."

I walked with uncertain steps from the room on the arm of the medical man, and, when we were out of hearing of the inspector, I put the question I had been *thinking* all the time I had been telling the story to them:

"Doctor, was—did I kill him?"

"No," he replied reassuringly. "Had I not been able to tell our friend in there the same thing, you would hardly be going home now. It was a close thing, and after all the matter of a few minutes only, but he died from heart disease, brought on by violent exertion and excitement."

Walter Rothwell.

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When The Birds Begin To Sing.

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CHAPTER XV.

In Clouds of Silence Folded Out of Sight.

While Eleanor is at Copthorne, Philip is staying in Trebovir Road with Mr. and Mrs. Lane.

"I cannot think why I have not heard from Eleanor," he says one morning to Erminie. "For three days not a word—no answer to my letters or the telegram."

"Really; it was a pity you were prevented running down that afternoon. I expect she was disappointed."

"I am not so sure about that," thinks Philip.

"It is just possible she may have written to Lyndhurst. Did she know you were staying on with us?"

"I told her so, but perhaps she forgot, or did not take it in. I shall go there to-morrow and see."

Philip is uneasy about Eleanor. Her silence hurts him, for he still loves her passionately, in spite of their quarrels and her deceptions. All that day he thinks constantly of his wife, picturing her image at every turn, wondering how she passes her quiet days in the old farmhouse, and whether she is happy at Copthorne. He has sent her some books and papers she asked for, but they have not been acknowledged.

He is not angry, but pained at her inconsideration, and the galling thought that he no longer holds even a corner in her heart is bitterest grief to him.

His friends notice his depression in the City, and remark about it. The hours are long, and the spring sunshine seems laughing at him. He pines for the country, the fresh green, the old love—Eleanor!

That evening the Lanes take him to the theatre. The play bores him to distraction, though they say that it is good. He remembers reading some excellent notices on it in the leading papers, and planning to take Eleanor the night after she returns. He is one of a gay, light-hearted party, and goes on with them to sup at the Savoy, feeling like a spectre at the feast. They sit at the same table where he once found his wife with that smiling hypocrite Mrs. Mounteagle, and the man he hates, loathes, fears.

These recollections render Philip but a poor companion.

Erminie, noticing his low spirits, planned the evening's entertainment to cheer him up.

She has a pretty little sister-in-law with her, who prattles merrily, and reminds Mr. Roche somewhat of Eleanor, in a tantalising manner, when she laughs and he catches her profile.

"I have never been to the celebrated Savoy before," she says. "Reggie declares it is a place where ladies go without their husbands when they want to be rakish and lively. It looks as if he were right, for I am certainly without my better half this evening. When I look at you and Nelson, and then think of Reggie and myself, I cannot imagine how it is all wives and husbands don't get on. I believe I have done a lot of harm since my wedding by advising everybody to marry, and throwing susceptible young people together in the most reckless manner."

"We have not given it a very long test," says Erminie, "but look at that startling beauty in yellow," changing the subject out of consideration for Philip.

"Oh! she is the leader of one of the fastest sets in town," Nelson vouchsafes, as Lady MacDonald, a mass of flashing diamonds and old gold brocade, enters into the restaurant.

The place sends Philip's flagging spirits down to zero, he is thankful to get home, and paces his room half that night thinking of Eleanor, and longing for the love of dear departed days.

"Perhaps when she comes back from Copthorne it will be different," he thinks. "I have been away too much in that miserable City, she has been dull, and thus fallen a prey to Mrs. Mounteagle's bad influence." He will give her more companions, keep his house full of guests, pleasant accommodating people who will not object to early breakfast, and dinner that invariably waits half-an-hour later than it should on account of his business.

He writes to Eleanor as the clock strikes two. His letter is full of promises for the future.

He paints a picture of delightful plans. They will have the house full until Easter, when he will take her abroad. She shall go wherever she pleases, and he will be her trusting, adoring slave. He will make it impossible for her not to love him.

For nearly an hour he pores over the sheet, telling Eleanor these good resolves.

"Dearest," he says in conclusion, "can't we begin our lives over again—love as we did in quiet Copthorne—before we drifted apart? I will try and be a better husband. Do come back to me soon, for I find I cannot get on without my little Eleanor. She is all the world to me."

Then he seals the envelope, and falls into a restless sleep, which is broken by haunting dreams of dimly suspected terrors.

Early in the morning Philip wakes, unrefreshed and heartsick. Still the question burns on his brain—Why has Eleanor not written?

He rises before the household is astir, and lets himself out into the mild air.

Hailing a hansom, he tells the man to drive him as quickly as possible to Richmond Terrace. Perhaps Erminie is right, and Eleanor has written to Lyndhurst after all.

Sarah starts as she sees Mr. Roche on the doorstep.

"Good-morning," he says, "are there any letters for me?"

He does not wait for the answer, but walks straight in, and takes up a pile of envelopes on the hall table.

A few circulars, a bill, and three letters addressed to Eleanor at Copthorne in his own handwriting, and forwarded back by Mrs. Grebby to Mrs. Roche at Lyndhurst.

He stares at them in mute amazement, as if in those white envelopes a horrible mystery lies unrolled.

He tears them slowly open one by one, reading what he knows so well already, the casual news, the fond farewells, penned only for Eleanor's eyes.

How is it she has never received them? How is it they have been sent back by Mrs. Grebby when Eleanor is *there*?

For the moment he is unnerved. Then pulls himself together, places the letters in his pocket, picks up his stick, and turns to go.

"Are you coming home to-day, sir?" asks Sarah.

"Coming home!" The words grate on him.

"No," he replies, "I am going to Mrs. Roche, at Copthorne."

Then he dashes out of the house, and reaches Trebovir Road just as Erminie and Nelson are at breakfast.

"We could not think what had become of you," cries Mrs. Lane, running out to meet him. "Why did you go out, and where have you been?"

Then she sees how pale he is, and the questions die on her lips.

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"Come in," she says gently. "I have got some hot coffee for you, and your favourite dish. What! you won't eat anything?"

"No thank you, dear, I haven't time. I only flew back to tell you I am off to Copthorne. I am a little anxious about Eleanor, not having written you know. She was rather seedy and done up before she left, and those old people are bad correspondents."

"You think she is ill?"

"I fear something is wrong."

"But you must have something before you go, or you will be quite faint."

Philip is not in the mood to argue, he answers her abruptly, almost rudely, and guessing that something is wrong, she lets him go, watching him drive away with sorrowful compassionate eyes.

"I am afraid poor Phil is in some trouble again," she says to Nelson, mechanically cracking the shell of her boiled eggs. "He has gone."

"What?"

"Yes," shaking her head solemnly, "and without any breakfast."

"But you should not let him."

"I could not help it. He is going to see Eleanor."

"Has she been leading the poor fellow another dance? What a curse that woman is!"

"Don't talk like that! I am very fond of Eleanor, with all her faults—almost as fond as of Phil, and you know how I love him. I am not sure what it is about her, but you can't bring yourself not to care for her. It's that pretty little confiding way, I think, and those lovely wistful eyes. She is so easily led and swayed. It is a great pity."

"She will come to a bad end, depend upon it," replies Nelson, congratulating himself on the good woman who crowns his home.

Philip takes the morning train to Copthorne. Business goes to the wind. He thinks only of his wife, and the letters that have come back so strangely into his keeping.

The journey seems interminable. He flings a pile of papers unread on the opposite seat, puts a cigar between his teeth, and forgets to light it, closes his tired eyes, which only quickens and excites his overwrought imagination, till finally the train steams into the drowsy little station of Copthorne.

Philip walks at the fastest possible speed across the meadows. There is the gate on which Eleanor perched herself the night before their wedding, declaring she *would* dangle her feet whether she was to be Mrs. Roche or not.

Then the green lane, where she asked him to wait till the following spring. He remembers her words distinctly. She had said them so lightly in reference to their union: "When the birds begin to sing, then I will marry you, Philip."

But he had proved himself the stronger, and carried off his prize that same month.

Now the spring is here. The birds are singing—mocking, jeering. The old farmhouse is in sight—he pauses.

Oh, what a moment of suspense.

No Eleanor comes across the garden to greet him. It all looks dead—still.

He can hear Rover's feeble bark—the sound savours of decay.

Then Philip walks forward, and his shadow falls across the porch. The bell peals.

Mrs. Grebby starts at the ring, and brushes past the little farmhouse servant hurrying to the door.

"Why, it's never Mr. Roche!" she exclaims.

"Yes," he replies; "I have come for Eleanor. Where is she?"

Mrs. Grebby sinks on to the seat in the porch, and stares at him open-mouthed.

"What do yer mean?" she gasps at last. "There ain't no harm come to my dearie!"

She wrings her hands despairingly.

"Has Eleanor left you?" he asks in a voice so strangely unfamiliar that he hardly knows it for his own.

"Three days ago. She went 'ome, to be sure, as bright and as bonny as could be, looking that pretty, I says to my old man, 'it's well she's not travellin' alone.'"

"Who was with her?" questions Philip intently, mastering his intense emotion.

"A friend what came the day you telegraphed. He said 'e'd see 'er back safe and sound. I packed 'er clothes with my own hands, I did, she never touched a thing, and we drove them both behind Black Bess to the station, with Rover following at the wheel."

A low hiss breaks from Philip's lips.

"And this man," he asks fiercely, impatiently, biting his lips. "What was he like?"

"Oh! 'e was a beautiful gentleman, so well dressed and handsome, Mr., let me see, Mr. Quinton I think she called him."

Philip has heard enough, he turns away with a groan.

Mrs. Grebby watches the dark despair creep over his features in blank amazement.

"What does it mean?" she asks, detaining him with a trembling hand.

"It means," replies Philip in a choking voice, "that Eleanor has left me."

A cry escapes Mrs. Grebby, she buries her face in her apron, rocking herself to and fro, moaning pitifully.

"We, as always kep' ourselves respectable, and never knew what it was to blush for any of our stock, and she 'as lifted the family, and married a good, real gentleman like yourself, sir, to bring disgrace and ruin on 'er 'appy 'ome. Oh! my, oh! my, the poor misguided lass!"

Philip, in his own agony, finds himself comforting the weeping woman, and praying her to bear up. Then, as she dries her streaming eyes, clasping his hand with a hoarse "God bless you, Mr. Roche," he hastens away with bent head and throbbing brow back over the green grass.

No curse rises to his silent lips; he is as one who has just heard of the sudden death of his dearest upon earth. Everything seems slipping from him. There is a long stretch of blank life before his bloodshot eyes.

He waits in a state of nervous prostration on a wooden bench at Copthorne Station till the return train to town appears.

Then he staggers forward into the first empty carriage, buries his face on the cushions, and sobs.

His strong frame shakes like a reed with the violence of his grief. He is weak, too, from having fasted since the previous night, and does not attempt to control his sorrow.

The maddening thought of Eleanor and Quinton together adds gall and wormwood to the desolation in the deserted husband's heart.

"With Quinton!" He repeats the words, grinding his teeth. Quinton, the low scoundrel, the fast, fascinating man of bad reputation, the villain who has betrayed his wife, his angel, and dragged her to the lowest depths of degradation! She is beyond Philip's help now, and he knows it—beyond redemption!

The Rubicon has been crossed. Eleanor is among the lost—on the other side!

Erminie is sitting under the pale light of a yellow lamp, deep in a novel.

The heroine is wavering on the verge of an irredeemable error, and Erminie's kind heart is thoroughly in the book. She is a sympathetic reader, and her eyes moisten as they scan the pages.

She is guilty of serious skipping, and as steps are heard in the hall below, glances at the finish.

A sigh of relief escapes her.

"Oh, I am glad she didn't! I am glad she is saved!" exclaims Mrs. Lane involuntarily, rising, as she thinks, to meet Nelson, since this is his hour to return.

Instead, Philip stands before her, white as a corpse. His haggard features are accentuated by the mellow lamp light, his figure sways, tottering till he steadies himself by grasping the back of a chair.

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He has not tasted food that day, and she fancies he looks shrunken, marvelling at his altered appearance.

She dares not ask him what has happened, but just gazes with wondering sympathy into his miserable eyes.

"It has come," he gasps, passing one hand over his brow.

"What?" murmurs Erminie, under her breath.

"Eleanor and Quinton—they have gone together."

His voice vibrates through the room. A gasp of horror escapes Mrs. Lane. She staggers back.

"What shall you do?" she asks.

"What will I do?" echoes Philip, his eyes flashing, and the colour rushing back in a flood to his ashen cheeks. "Find her—track her to the end of the earth. Everything in life has closed to me this day. I shall only exist for one motive—one unswerving aim. She thinks she has escaped me, but the world is small, and while Eleanor and I are both in the same hemisphere——"

He pauses, for the room swims round.

A look that Erminie can never forget crosses his face—a look of sublime love, checked by an expression of devilish rage and hatred. The two seem battling a moment for pre-eminence.

Then he draws himself up to his full height, as if fighting for breath, and falls heavily upon the floor at Erminie's feet. Nelson's voice is heard calling her without.

She rushes to the door with a wild cry:

"Help—help! Philip is DEAD!"

CHAPTER XVI.

Ah, for some retreat,
Deep in yonder shining Orient.—TENNYSON.

"HAVE you ever heard anything more of that poor Mr. Roche, whose wife deserted him?" asks Erminie's sister-in-law.

"No," replies Mrs. Lane sadly. "We had one awful night when he came and told us the news, and fainted. I am so weak-minded, I thought he was dead immediately, and shrieked and tore my hair, and made quite a scene. I always jump at conclusions, it is so stupid of me. Nelson had a bad time of it that night. We sent for a doctor, but it was ages before we got him round, and then he seemed so strange and reticent that it frightened me still more. I thought he would lose his reason, he had just that look on his face. The following day he left us without a word. He just held both my hands very tightly, and said thank you with his eyes. Of course I made a fool of myself, and kissed him and cried over him like a child, which only made matters worse. I asked him what he intended doing, and he gasped 'Eleanor' under his breath, and rushed out of the house. We have never seen him since."

Philip stands before her.

"How strange. Then he has entirely vanished out of your lives? I thought he seemed strangely depressed at the theatre, the evening we went to the Savoy."

"Ah! that was the night before."

"Yes, he disappointed me. I had heard so much of your charming cousin, but I suppose the poor fellow had some inkling of it then."

"I never expect to see him again. He was a very sensitive man, and the curious or condoling looks of acquaintances would have driven him mad. Nelson says he has left England, yet no one knows where he has gone. The nice home on Richmond Terrace is broken up, and I have practically lost a brother. It was a strange ending to his married career."

"That is what comes of marrying beneath you. These people with low minds——"

Erminie stops her sister-in-law with a deprecating gesture. She is staunch to Philip, and knows how it would pain him to hear these words.

"I was fond of her," she says simply. "Let us talk of something else."

* * *

"I wish we could go up to the source of the Irrawaddy River, where no white man has ever been," says Eleanor, laying her hand confidingly in Carol's. "I should not be afraid with you, dear—such a traveller, and knowing the country so well. How many years is it since you were last in India?"

"Over seven. How did I drag through them without you?" he replies tenderly.

"We had a glorious voyage, didn't we? and everybody was so nice to us. I remember, Carol, how frightened I felt when first you suggested this long journey, and promised to take me north of Burmah to this strange, uncivilised village, where I should have to eat nothing but rice, or shoot my own game. Of course you had been here before, and though it is so wild and out of the way, there are still some white people to remind us we are not all savages."

"My dear, you must not call them 'savages,'" he says smiling. "They are really very nice, though a trifle odd and original, but that is what you like, I believe."

"Oh! yes. I am quite in love with my black servants. I think they are ever so much more picturesque and pleasant than my Richmond acquaintances. They look on me as a white angel, which no one would have done at home," with a smile at her quiet humour.

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Eleanor's feelings by now are blunted to a certain extent, and she frequently jests on the wholesome horror with

Falls heavily on the floor at Erminie's feet.

which her English friends must now regard "that reckless Mrs. Roche!"

Yet there are times when the thought of her sin rises like a dark thundercloud over the sunshine of this life of love.

She is standing in the low verandah of her bamboo house, looking out over a network of gorges, rifts, and ravines, precipices in peaks, with villages crowning each crest. The houses are thatched with long grass, which grows over the hills, while below in the valley the rice is cultivated in terraces. The villages are stockaded with bamboo, and the water runs through them in troughs of split bamboo.

"The people are certainly very dirty," says Eleanor, watching an old woman with large amber earrings, pounding rice, and talking to a dusky man in a blue turban.

"Yes. They wear their clothes till they fall off, and never wash except when it rains. That man below is a noted warrior in these parts."

"How do you know?"

"You see the sword slung over his shoulder, with a bamboo hoop? Well, the tiger's hoop is a sign of distinction."

"I wish the old woman would stop pounding. She makes my back ache to look at her. She has been making linen on a loom all day, and must be dreadfully tired."

"Did you notice the bell on it?"

"Yes. What was that for?"

"So that her lord and master may know when she stops working."

"There was a funeral to-day," says Eleanor; "the guns have been going since morning in the jungle, to keep the spirits off. What a misery it must be to believe in 'Nâts.'* That old woman there gave me a charm. I am always to wear it to keep the devils off. Do you think it will, Carol?" with a low laugh. "Or am I theirs already?"

"Don't, Eleanor," he cries, drawing her to him. "I cannot bear to hear you say such things."

She wriggles herself free, determined to tease him.

"But there are heaps of devils about," she declares, shaking her head, "or else why do they put up arches especially to keep them off—propitiate them, and prevent their entrance into the village? They have little bamboo huts like dolls' houses, and place food inside, that the devils may lodge and eat. It seems that the corpse to-day had a good time of it. They gave him a month's food, new gong and gun, a complete set of new clothes, and two or three gourds of Zoo—they are always drunk with that stuff. It is an awfully strong drink, though made from rice, which sounds innocent, doesn't it? Rice always reminds me of my bib and tucker days."

"It is rather like English cider, with the strength of whisky. But what a lot of information you pick up, little woman, while I am out shooting!"

"It terrifies me when you are away all day," she declares. "Then I feel lonely—deserted—afraid. Tigers and bears are such alarming things to picture you chasing, though you are accompanied by a troop of negroes."

Eleanor leans back in a low chair, gazing wistfully across the wild country. She can see the course of the Irrawaddy river, with its numerous rapids and picturesque cascades. It seems only the other day that she and Carol steamed up it, past Mandalay, Bhanio, and Myitkyina. She wishes they could travel on overland through the jade, amber, and ruby mines, but Carol fears for her, and prefers to stay in these more quasi-civilised regions.

A group of women and girls strikes her eye, carrying loads supported by a strap encircling their foreheads, after the curious fashion of Dundee fisherwomen.

The unmarried girls wear square-cut fringes and their hair hanging loosely at the sides to the shoulders, while the married women have it done up decorously on the head.

"I am glad I have not to carry loads like those poor creatures," says Eleanor softly, "yet perhaps an external load is better than an internal one. Sometimes Carol I remember that I once had a conscience. It just stirs and half wakes when I am quite alone. Often in the darkness I fancy I see Philip, or feel as if he were near me. I would sooner die a thousand deaths than meet his eyes."

"Do not think of it, dearest; we have cut ourselves adrift from old associations for that purpose. There is nothing to remind you or trouble you."

"Nothing," replied Eleanor, "I am content, Carol. We have discovered an Eden—after the fall."

* * *

Eleanor is in a roving

She is standing in the low verandah.

mood, and while Carol is engaged in the mild sport of pheasant shooting for a change, she wanders alone into the jungle to watch the children playing with large beans like marbles. Though she cannot understand what they say, she grasps the method of the game, watching it

*Spirits.

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with amused interest. They are such queer little dusky creatures.

One boy among them especially attracts her attention. His face is strangely European, and his features noticeably different to those of his comrades. Yet his skin is dark and swarthy, there can be no mistaking the black blood in his veins.

Now and again Eleanor fancies she catches an English exclamation from his lips. She wishes she could join the children in their gambols, as in her girlhood at Copthorne. But they eye her suspiciously and sidle away when she approaches.

She wanders back disconsolately, wishing she knew more of the boy with the European face.

That very day her wish is satisfied. It is late in the afternoon, and Carol is still out. She is too blinded by love to resent his selfishness in leaving her so much alone, and wanders down to the river, singing from sheer lightness of heart.

She sees as she saunters along a trap set for a deer, and gives it a wide berth as she passes.

It consists of a noose fastened to the top of a pliant tree, which is bent down and pegged across a path leading down to the water. Thus it serves to entrap prey on the way to drink.

She has scarcely gone a hundred yards when a shriek rends the air, and turning simultaneously Eleanor sees a small boy trip over the noose, which released from the peg, flies back with the full force of the tree, carrying him into the air with it.

She rushes up terror-stricken at the horrible sight. The screaming child is suspended far above her head, the cruel thongs cutting deeply into his flesh.

The sight puts energy and cat-like agility into her limbs. She climbs the tree with all the daring of her orchard days, tearing great rents in her dress, spurred on by the cries of the helpless victim. She creeps on hands and knees along the willowy bow, upon which he hangs, till her weight combined with his, brings the inevitable result. A creak, a crash, and the two fall together to the ground. Unharmed herself save for a few bruises and scratches, Eleanor releases the unfortunate child, raising his bleeding body tenderly in her arms, binding up the wounds with her handkerchief, and soothing his groans with kisses.

"Oh! dear," she says, "I wish I knew where you lived, you poor little darling."

To her intense surprise the boy replies:

"Up there," pointing feebly with his injured arm.

Then she sees for the first time he is the child with the European features.

"Will it hurt you if I carry you back?" asks Eleanor.

"Best try," answers the boy abruptly.

He is heavy for his age, but she staggers forward manfully, while the little aching head drops confidingly on her shoulder.

"You're awful pretty," he gasps at last, "and I am dropping no end of blood off my arm on your bodice. Oh! how my leg hurts. Guess I have broken it clean in two."

At every step Eleanor fears she must give in, the perspiration is standing out on her forehead, while her own wounds smart and ache.

"I am afraid I shake you terribly up this hill, would you like me to rest a moment?"

Eleanor hopes he will say yes, for her strength is giving out.

"Sit on that stone, I'm just dying," moans the little lad.

Eleanor eagerly assents, and moves him into a more comfortable position.

"My mother is white like you," he says at last, raising his head.

"Is she dear? Are you better? Shall we go on?"

"Yes, please. We may meet father, he is ever so big and dark. I shall be big and dark too, all the good men are black."

"And the good women?" asks Eleanor, smiling in spite of her load.

"Oh! white of course, white all over like you and mother, hands, feet, everything."

Eleanor staggers on breathlessly up the hill, the boy seems to grow heavier at every step. She is nearly exhausted. He is like the weight of her sin, which increases with time.

Once or twice she stumbles, the boy clutches her round the neck, fearing she will fall upon him, and his hands half choke her. She gasps for breath.

"Is it much further?" she pants, turning sick and dizzy with the climb.

"No, there is my house, that hut ahead, see."

It has come in sight not a moment too soon, for Eleanor's arms are cramped and paralysed by supporting his body, her cheek pale with the heat, her heart fluttering spasmodically.

Only a few steps more, and she will have reached the haven of refuge. How foolish it would be to fail now.

Through sheer force of will she reaches the hut, and as the boy cries "Mother! mother!" she sinks exhausted in the entrance, still holding her suffering burden in her arms.

A woman rushes out, and takes her bleeding son from the stranger's embrace.

"He has been hurt," explains Eleanor faintly. "I carried him up the hill."

"Oh, you good soul!" cries the grateful mother, feeling her son's arms and legs; "and you're just as done up as can be. Come in, you poor young thing, and I'll give you a drink of Zoo to pull you round."

"No, thank you, I don't want anything. I am better now; but let me help you with the boy. We had better get his things off, and wash the wounds."

Together the two women tend the child. His leg is strained, not broken, and they put him to bed and watch him till he falls into a restless sleep.

Then their eyes meet, and the mother holds out her hand to Eleanor.

"God bless you!" she says; "if anything had happened to Tombo we should have broken our hearts. He is our only child."

Eleanor has recounted the history of the accident, leaving her share in the background, and making as light of it as possible.

She thinks as she looks at the white woman, with her fair hair and sandy eyelashes, that something in the face brings an indistinct memory to her mind.

She glances curiously round the hut, adorned by the heads of animals.

"I must go," she says; "it is getting late."

"The boy is sleeping. I will walk home with you."

"No, stay by him. I shall be all right alone."

"They have shot a tiger, and will all be drunk in the village for a week. You are different to me. I must come."

"Thank you," says Eleanor. "I shall enjoy your companionship. May I ask your name?"

"Elizabeth Kachin. And yours?"

"Eleanor—Eleanor Quinton."

Mrs. Roche's eyes droop as she turns them away from the sleeping face of that innocent child.

(*To be continued.*)

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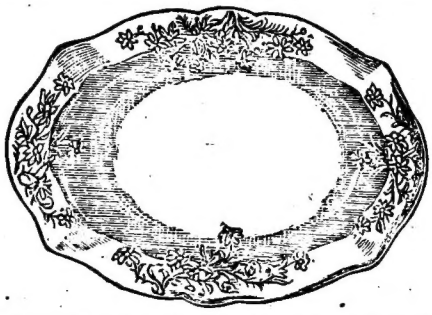

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